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# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

## THESIS

**PERPETUAL WARS: THE PHILIPPINE INSURGENCIES**

by

Ricardo C. Morales

December 2003

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Douglas Porch

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**PERPETUAL WAR: THE PHILIPPINE INSURGENCIES**

Ricardo C. Morales  
Colonel, Philippine Army  
B.S., Philippine Military Academy, 1977

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(SECURITY BUILDING IN POST-CONFLICT POST –  
CONFLICT ENVIRONMENTS)**

from the

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Philippines is afflicted by two of the longest running insurgencies in the world. The communist New People's Army (NPA) have been fighting to establish a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist state since 1969. The Muslim separatist movements represented by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and a break away faction, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), have been fighting a rebellion since 1973. Although the government and the MNLF have signed a peace agreement in 1996, violence continues to erupt in the island of Mindanao, where the Muslim population is concentrated. The resources spent on these insurgencies are a heavy burden on the Philippine economy and the unstable peace and order conditions created by it have kept the country's economic performance far below that of its regional neighbors.

But these conflicts could have been settled earlier and the Philippines could have devoted more time and resources to resolving the economic causes which drove the insurgencies in the first place.

Why these conflicts managed not only to survive but to recover is the subject of thesis. How the government responded to these internal challenges, what strategy the rebels adapted and the intervention of 3<sup>rd</sup> parties partly explain why these insurgencies have been active for more than three decades.



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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Philippines continues to be afflicted by two very long running insurgencies. The communist New People's Army (NPA) has been fighting to establish a Marxist state since 1969. The Muslim separatist movements represented by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and a break away faction, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), have been fighting for a separate Muslim state since 1973. Although the government and the MNLF have signed a peace agreement in 1996, violence continues to erupt in the island of Mindanao, where the Muslim population is concentrated. The resources spent on these insurgencies constitute a heavy burden on the Philippine economy. Furthermore, the unstable peace and order conditions created by it have kept the country's economic performance far below that of its regional neighbors.

These insurgencies could have been resolved earlier if the Philippine government had pursued a straightforward policy to eliminate the insurgencies either by militarily defeating the rebels or by eliminating its root causes. Instead, what is emerging is an ambivalent government strategy of fight-and-develop – an approach that assumes the country can fight the rebellions while at the same time pursuing economic development. Under this strategy neither goal of defeating the insurgencies or achieving national development will be realized because of insufficient resources for both efforts and unfavorable peace and order conditions. Moreover, fight-and-develop appears not to be product of careful and profound deliberation. It is a strategy that only becomes apparent in hindsight. Its results are a conflict continuing for more than 30 years.

In 1985, after twelve years of fighting, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) had decisively reduced the MNLF into scattered and isolated bands which were slowly turning into criminals. Yet the government failed to capitalize on the situation and today (2003), 18 years and P150 billion later, the situation is worse than it was in 1985.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Figures are drawn from a statement made by Paul Dominguez, former Presidential Assistant for Regional Development-Mindanao, citing a preliminary World Bank study. The cost of the war, according to this source, was P30 million a day.

The communist insurgency was reduced to its lowest point in 1995 when its guerilla strength dropped to about 6,000 from a high of 25,000 in 1987. Today the NPA claims that their strength stands at almost 13,000. Both insurgencies have spawned splinter groups that continue to fight and wreak violence making a peace settlement with the Government inconclusive.

Why these conflicts manage not only to survive for more than thirty years but to recover from the brink of defeat is the subject of this thesis. This topic is of obvious importance to those concerned with conflict termination, counterinsurgency, and post-colonial development. International peacekeeping involves third party mediators and even troops to police agreements. This approach assumes that the warring factions are willing to end their conflict, and need only to overcome the insecurities of steps to demobilize, disarm and reintegrate them into society. When there is massive distrust, the fear of commitment to peace can be overcome by certain confidence building measures, for example, the integration of former rebels into the government's security forces or limited demilitarization.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the warring parties in the Philippines are not willing to abandon their fight. As such, scholarship on counterinsurgency should provide clues as to why some insurgencies last longer than others, but this literature does not yet account for the particular combination of factors in the Philippines case which has both an ethnic and an ideological insurgency. [note -- The Philippines is especially interesting because the government has had the opportunity to fully defeat the rebels militarily, and the government created openings for rebels to rebuild.]

Most insurgencies end in a rebel victory or a negotiated settlement. James D. Fearon has classified insurgencies according to their duration and reports that ethnic and peripheral insurgencies, i.e., insurgencies far removed from the national capital and composed of a racially or culturally distinct segment of the population, tend to last

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[http://www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/IdpProjectDb/idpSurvey.nsf/AllDocWeb/16A169D91BBFC1A5C1256D41002A0344/\\$file/Cost+of+War\\_balay\\_5\\_june03.pdf](http://www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/IdpProjectDb/idpSurvey.nsf/AllDocWeb/16A169D91BBFC1A5C1256D41002A0344/$file/Cost+of+War_balay_5_june03.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Walter. *Designing Transitions From Civil War: Demobilization, Democratization and Commitment to Peace*. International Security, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999)

longer.<sup>3</sup> Historically, there are only two clear cut and permanent cases of governments defeating insurgencies – Malaya from 1948 to 1960 and Nigeria-Biafra from 1967 to 1970. The Malayan Emergency had an ethnic character and involved the military participation of British Commonwealth forces. Most of the Malayan communist were ethnic Chinese, distinct from the indigenous Malays. The Biafran civil war was peripheral and ethnic – Igbo against non-Igbo Nigerians. Neither of these insurgencies have re-emerged and although internal conflict is fairly common in Nigeria, it is not a revival of the Biafra civil war. [3] Post-colonial states like Malaysia and, by extension, China and even Vietnam, have been able to develop economically, or are on a path of steady economic growth, only after defeating their insurgencies or achieving state consolidation. The counterinsurgency effort in the Philippines is therefore necessary both to the prospect of war termination and economic development.

This thesis will explain the unusual longevity of the current Philippine insurgencies in the context of three variables: the Government's responses to these internal challenges, the respective rebel strategies and the intervention by 3<sup>rd</sup> parties.

How governments respond to an internal challenge is significant to the duration and outcome of insurgencies. Governments can quickly end the insurgency by conceding to all rebel demands or it can attempt to crush the rebellion by applying all the military force it can muster.<sup>4</sup> Ivan Arreguin-Toft argues that strategic interaction, how warring parties in an asymmetric contest respond to the other, determines outcome.<sup>5</sup> Stronger actors can lose to weaker actors if it applies the wrong strategy. The Philippine Government is the stronger actor in the Moro and communist insurgencies, but is nonetheless vulnerable to rebel exploitation of mis-steps.

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<sup>3</sup> James D. Fearon. *Why Some Insurgencies Last Longer Than Others*. Paper presented at the World Bank-DECRG-sponsored conference, "Civil Wars and Post-Conflict Transition" at the University of California-Irvine, May 18-20, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> It can be argued that civil war termination can only be classified as either a government win (G), or a rebel win (R) since no government, if it has any chance of crushing the insurgency, will be willing to make any concessions during a negotiated settlement (S). The policy of no-negotiations with terrorist groups that some governments adopt is an example.

<sup>5</sup> Ivan Arreguin-Toft. *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*. International Security, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2001.



Rebel strategy also offers a powerful explanation for conflict duration. In guerilla warfare strategy, the weaker actor can ‘hemorrhage’ the stronger actor by extending the period of conflict since the relative cost is much higher for the strong than for the weak. The NPA is a particularly obdurate and intractable rebellion that has steadfastly maintained its strategy of protracted war; it has already exceeded the duration of the Chinese and Vietnamese civil wars which served as its model. Yet, it is nowhere near its goal of revolutionary victory.

Finally, third party intervention can extend the duration of conflict by providing a weaker side with resources with which to continue the conflict. Such has been the case with the *Moro* rebellion, although recently this intervention has taken a more moderate influence.

Together these factors provide a major explanation for the duration of these insurgencies that have remained active for more than three decades.

## **A. THESIS ORGANIZATION**

Chapter II traces the development what some Filipino scholars call the country’s revolutionary heritage and how this heritage makes violent protest a likely option. The Philippines, because of its unique geography and history, is more prone to internal conflict than other states. Until the American period, the inhabitants of the archipelago identified themselves by tribe and language and, because of cruelty and oppression by colonial authority had developed a deep-seated suspicion of any centralizing force. The tension between the centralizing force of nation-building and the centripetal pull of regional and ethnic loyalty often broke out in violence all along Philippine history. Colonial policy planted the seeds of the present-day Muslim-Christian strife in Mindanao and created a small but enormously wealthy and politically powerful elite that rules Philippine society up to the present time. The country’s physical geography also explains

why it is difficult for any central authority to achieve national unity just as it is almost impossible for a rebel movement to spread and realize total victory.

Chapter III focuses on the development of the communist insurgency from its origins in the pre-World War II *Sakdal* peasant uprising, to the Huk rebellion of the 1950's, to the present CPP/NPA rebellion. The communist insurgency continues to thrive because of inadequate government efforts to eliminate the socio-economic causes of agrarian unrest. Nevertheless, the communist guerillas still face the difficulty of accumulating sufficient arms to defeat government security forces. It has not been able to do this partly because of the difficulty of smuggling arms into an archipelagic country and also partly due to the absence of a generous and determined foreign sponsor. This situation has created a rebel movement totally devoid of foreign encumbrances – a truly self-contained and independent movement. It is thus impervious to 3<sup>rd</sup> party pressure. The communist have also adopted a protracted war strategy and this partly explains their longevity. Another reason for the CPP/NPA to continue their struggle is the lucrative revenues that rebellion endows on its practitioners. Despite several near defeats the NPA today is sustained not only by their strategy and income but also by government bungling which can be interpreted as impending signs of revolutionary victory. Some of these signs are a weak economy, a grid-locked government bureaucracy, widespread public dissatisfaction. For the purpose of this thesis the term “NPA” will be used to refer to the current communist-led insurgency in the Philippines.

Chapter IV covers the Muslim or *Moro* separatist movement. It chronicles the Muslim-Christian conflict from its historical roots as Asian victims of the *reconquista* to the present-day struggle for a Muslim homeland. In their fight for secession, the *Moros* aimed for a quick victory followed the *fait accompli* of a *Bangsamoro* or a Muslim state in Mindanao. They have been strongly influenced by 3<sup>rd</sup> parties, like other Muslim countries, but this influence has recently had a moderating effect. The process of resolving the separatist movement in Mindanao has been slow and painful. The Government's response to the Muslim rebellion is a mix of diplomacy, political concessions, economic development and military campaigns. Some of these efforts have

been more successful than others, but success appears to be near. Government ineptitude breathed new life into a movement that has been defeated in the mid-1980's. Still, local conditions like economic marginalization, the root cause of Muslim dissatisfaction, remains a major influence on the situation in Mindanao where most of the violence related to this rebellion takes place.

Finally, Chapter V compares the two insurgencies and shows how each is influenced by the aforementioned factors especially by the fight and develop strategy. Although each rebellion is exclusive from the other, they both oppose the same enemy – the Government. Each rebellion responds differently to government initiatives like the infrastructure projects in the Bondoc Peninsula and the Mal-Mar Irrigation Project. Each rebellion has also shed off splinter groups. The behavior of these splinter groups are markedly different from those of its counterpart in the other movement. Concerns with other security threats posed by rightist elements within its own security forces and by the NPA prevented the Philippine government from fully exploiting its military advantage in negotiations with the MNLF in 1986. The Government's efforts to terminate the conflicts remain futile because its strategy of fight and develop is inherently flawed. Economic and political development efforts refuse to take root because of unfavorable conditions created by the insurgencies. The Government remains dependent on short-term, military-based remedies. The AFP itself is increasingly restive as it is being politicized by the conflict it is fighting. The Government will have to first defeat the insurgencies before any of its development efforts will bear fruit. It cannot do both at the same time.

## II. A CONFLICT-PRONE SOCIETY

Anthropological evidence exists that internal conflict occurred among the early inhabitants of the Philippines long before the era of European colonization. Samuel K. Tan identifies these as following two patterns – within the tribe and between tribes.<sup>6</sup> Intra-tribal disturbances were struggles for supremacy or status among the leaders of local society; inter-tribal encounters were over control of resources for group security. The headhunting and ethnic feuding practices of the mountain tribes in Luzon are examples of this second category. The blood feuds and vendettas that exist to this day in some parts of the Philippines, called *rido*, are residual evidence of this historical practice. There was also a ritualistic element in the violence of pre-Hispanic Philippines. In pre-colonial Southeast Asia, Tony Day reports, “men of prowess” resorted to violence when they sought vengeance, prestige, manpower, and wealth.<sup>7</sup> Clifford Geertz used the term ‘theater state’ when he referred to the rituals and ceremonies of pre-colonial Bali. Ritual, he argued, holds the state together in Southeast Asia, as opposed to force in Europe.<sup>8</sup>

Over time, tribal violence metamorphosed into rebellion against central authority, first against the foreign colonizers, then against a government composed of other Filipinos. In part this transformation can be explained by the Philippines’ colonial experience – the forging through more than 300 years of struggle of the Filipino revolutionary heritage. Yet many societies which can claim to have similar historical experiences have successfully made the transition from traditional to modern states. The Philippines remains in the turbulent mid-stream of socio-political transformation.

The communist and Moro rebellions are the present day manifestation of a historical thread of internal violence – from intertribal encounters to secessionist movements - that has been a constant feature of the Philippine socio-political terrain.

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<sup>6</sup> Samuel K. Tan, *The Bangsamoro Struggle*. UP Forum Online. Official Publication of the University of the Philippines, Tomo 1, Blg. 7, May/June 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Tony Day cites Battye 1974 and Wolters 1999 in *Violence and Beauty*, Chapter 5 in : *Fluid Iron: State Formation in Southeast Asia*.

<sup>8</sup> Clifford Geertz. “Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali”. 1990. Princeton University Press. NJ.

Today the insurgencies continue to pose a serious obstacle to the development and progress of Philippine society. The country's economic growth and development has been severely impeded by losses in human capital, reduced investments, destruction of infrastructure and disruption of markets.<sup>9</sup> The colonizers ultimately left the Philippines in the hand of an elite group cultivated by themselves, so that post-colonial Philippines much resembled colonial Philippines, only without foreign rule. When confronted with rebellion, colonizers typically fight at first, only to abandon their investments. Foreign occupiers sought to extract economic gains from the Philippines, but sparked resistance to their rule. After their departure, even Filipino rulers would be forced to fight, at the same time they sought to develop, the Philippines.

#### **A. SPANISH ARRIVAL**

When Spain began colonization of the Philippines in 1565, the inhabitants who lived in the fragmented and self-governed villages in the islands did not see themselves as part of a centralized and cohesive whole. These pre-colonial communities were held together by kinship. An early account describes the inhabitants of *Luções* (Luzon) as “nearly all heathen; they have no king but are ruled by groups of elders.”<sup>10</sup> In the south, in some parts of Mindanao and in the island of Sulu, Islam had been introduced in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. It arrived by way of Indonesia through traders and proselytizers. By the early 16<sup>th</sup> century Muslim sultanates were firmly established in some parts of Mindanao and a proto-sultanate was developing in Manila to the north. The Muslim elite had strong ties with the rulers of Borneo and may have been related by kinship. Filipino folklore recounts the saga of the ten Bornean *datus* who migrated to the Philippines in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> In any event, until the coming of the Spaniards, the inhabitants of the islands looked west – to Borneo and to China - for cultural illumination.

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<sup>9</sup> James Murdoch and Todd Sandler. *Economic Growth, Civil Wars and Spatial Spillovers*. Paper funded in part by DRG, WB. July 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Tomé Pires. *The Hakluyt Society. The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires and the Book of Francisco Rodrigues*. Original 1515, reprinted by Kraus Reprint Ltd., Nendeln/Liechtenstein, 1967. p. 133

<sup>11</sup> Village chief. This saga is based on oral history and has not been confirmed by archeological evidence.

Although ‘discovered’ in 1521 by Magellan, colonization of the Philippines only began more than forty years later with the arrival from Mexico of an expedition led by Miguel Lopez de Legazpi. The Spaniards alternatively used guile and coercion to colonize the islands. They quickly defeated the nascent Manila sultanate ruled by Rajah Sulayman and on its site established the colonial capital. Colonial policy pursued three objectives in the Philippines - to acquire a share in the spice trade, to develop trade with Japan and China and to convert the natives to Christianity.<sup>12</sup> These policies would have profound repercussions on the political and social development of the islands. The colonizers quickly realized that the islands did not have the spices of the Moluccas or the silver and gold mines of South America. Under colonial rule the Philippines simply became Spain’s outpost for competition with other European rivals. Its internal development was neglected because of pre-occupation with imperial concerns. Although the colonization of the natives was met with little initial resistance, when force was required the colonial power applied a policy of *divide et imperia* by employing natives from one region to subjugate another.

Under Spain religion provided identify and became the first homogenizing glue that began to integrate the widely dispersed tribes under a single authority. Religious pageantry reinforced the natives’ propensity for ritual, symbolism and superstition. It facilitated their conversion. Although they spoke a wide variety of dialects unintelligible to each other, they recognized one another as fellow Christians. Because it was imposed rather than freely embraced, religion was a weak and fragile bond. This identify, of course, was not shared by the Muslims.

The Muslims in the south, with a more advanced socio-political organization were more successful in resisting colonization. The Spaniards lumped all Muslims together as ‘*moros*’, after their erstwhile adversaries in the *reconquista* and derisively called the other natives ‘*indios*’. In their encounters against colonial intrusions the Muslims were

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<sup>12</sup> *Philippine Army: The 1<sup>st</sup> 100 Years*. 1997. Philippine Army publication, henceforth PhilArmy 100 Years.

often pitted against the Christianized natives whom the colonizers employed as auxiliaries. Formerly fraternal, the relationship between the Muslims and non-Muslims (and now Christians) became one of resentment and suspicion.<sup>13</sup> No permanent colonial presence was established in Sulu until the mid-1800s.

The Muslims or *Moros* retaliated against the Spanish attacks with slaving raids on coastal Christian towns and villages all over the archipelago. Coastal villages were razed and most of their population sold into slavery. Maritime raiding was already an established activity in the Sulu zone even before the period of colonization. Slaving raids became especially ferocious during the hundred years from about mid-1700s on. These raids, which were conducted mainly by the *Iranun-Balangingi*, a seagoing Muslim tribe from Sulu, “severely hampered the overall social and material well-being and growth of the Philippine island world and the colonial state.”<sup>14</sup> It was mainly from this period that the image of the *Moros* as backward and predatory developed among Christians. Divided by faith, they eventually became two cultures apart.

## **1. The Early Revolts**

It did not take long for the converted natives to revolt. In the northern and central parts of the archipelago, numerous revolts broke out as the natives resented their loss of freedom and the abuses of the colonizers. These revolts followed a certain pattern. The earlier revolts, which occurred in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, were anti-invasion, intended to eject the colonizers. Most of these early revolts sought aid from outside powers like Brunei or even Japan.<sup>15</sup> The succeeding revolts during the 17<sup>th</sup> century were directed against specific colonial practice like *reduccion* - the forced relocation of the populations and against maltreatment- and *polo* – forced labor. Some revolts of this period were atavistic, led by self-styled religious leaders who called for a rejection of Catholicism and

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<sup>13</sup> Cesar A. Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*. 1999. University of the Philippines Press. Quezon City, Philippines.

<sup>14</sup> James Francis Warren. *Iranun Balangingi: Globalization, Maritime Raiding and the Birth of Ethnicity*. Seng Lee Press Pte Ltd. Singapore, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*, Tala Publishing Services, Quezon City, 1975

a return to animist practice. The *Tamblot*, *Bankaw* and *Tapar* revolts were typical of this type. The Chinese, too, who had established an important commercial presence in Manila, revolted against the colonial authorities in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. Except for the *Dagohoy* revolt in Bohol island which lasted 85 years, all revolts were short lived and isolated.

## 2. The Rise of a National Elite

The isolated and peripheral nature of the early revolts changed when a national elite emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The local elite, called the *principalia*, where the descendants of the village chiefs or *datus* who were co-opted by the Spanish colonial authorities to help administer the villages in their behalf.<sup>16</sup> These community leaders were called *cabezas de barangay* or *gobernadorcillos*. The actual number of Spaniards in the islands was miniscule compared to the native population. The colonial authorities ruled by creating a core of local collaborators. The policy of indirect rule did not require a massive bureaucracy and the distance from Spain discouraged many peninsular Spaniards from making the voyage. A book published in 1870 records the number of Spanish speakers as only 2.8% of the population, then estimated at 4.5 million.<sup>17</sup> Since this included natives who learned the language, the actual number must have been smaller. Indirect rule is a colonial policy, also applied by the British in India, of ruling through a native bureaucracy. However, unlike the British, Spain did not create a civil service; it created an elite.

Up to 1815 colonial economic focus was on the trade between China and Mexico which passed through the Philippines. Little was done to develop the islands until the 19<sup>th</sup> century when export crops such as sugar, tobacco, indigo and abaca fiber began to be cultivated in earnest. With the introduction of commercial agriculture, the *cabezas* and *gobernadorcillos* began to accumulate wealth and status. Certain privileges were

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<sup>16</sup> Constantino, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> Agustin de Cavada quoted in "Statistics: The Spanish Language in the Philippines", *Circulo Hispano-Filipino*. <http://de.geocities.com/hispanofilipino/Articles/Estadisticas02Eng.html> accessed 21 October 2003.



extended to them as incentive for their participation in the colonial administration. Enjoying their economic status, they sought to solidify their position in society by emulating the colonizers. They sent their children to school, some to Europe, where they absorbed the ideas of liberalism then sweeping the continent. These Western-educated scions of the *principalia* were called *ilustrados*. Jose Rizal, the national hero, was one of these European educated *ilustrados*.

The real powers in the islands were the curates. It was through religion rather than through force that Spain colonized the Philippines and it was the friars who constituted the colonial cadre. Renato Constantino in his paper “*Identity and Consciousness: The Philippine Experience*”, recounts the clerical boast that “in each friar in the Philippines the king had a captain general and a whole army”.<sup>18</sup> The curates exerted more influence over the natives than the colonial government because they were less concerned with commercial enterprises and more with converting the heathen and saving souls. However, some religious orders did have considerable landholdings and commercial interests but still pursued their evangelical role.

### **3. From Reform to Revolution**

The returning *ilustrados* sought to correct the difference between European and Philippine societies. The freedom they enjoyed in the continent contrasted sharply with the repression and abuse they saw at home. At first, they sought reform, proposing to incorporate the Philippines as a province of Spain and representation in parliament. Philippine historians called this the Propaganda Movement and their composition was illustrative of the national elite. Jose Rizal, Graciano Lopez-Jaena and Marcelo del Pilar came from different regions in the Philippines, but they converged on a common purpose – reform of colonial policy.

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<sup>18</sup> Renato Constantino, “*Identity and Consciousness: The Philippine Experience*”, paper presented in Symposium 3 of the VIII World Sociology Congress, Toronto, Canada, August 20, 1974. He quotes from *Los Frailes Filipinos por un español que ha residido en aquel pais*, Madrid, 1898, p. 59

In 1872, an insurrection by native auxiliaries in Cavite, near Manila, was brutally crushed by the colonial authorities. In the witch hunt that followed many innocent Filipinos were executed. The most prominent of these were three Filipino priests whose only crime was advocating for a liberalization of Church policy on native priests.<sup>19</sup> Many in the propaganda movement saw in the events of 1872 hopelessness in reform and began to turn to revolution.

#### 4. The *Katipunan* and Filipino Nationalism

Andres Bonifacio, the leader of first national revolution was a self-educated individual of humble origins who was inspired by the examples of the French and American revolutions. He founded a secret society called the *Katipunan* which was to become the nucleus of the revolutionary army against Spain.<sup>20</sup> The plot was divulged to the colonial authorities and the revolution was launched prematurely in 1896. Unlike previous revolts, the revolution of 1896 was widespread, covering all the provinces surrounding Manila, with sympathetic outbreaks in the rest of Luzon and the Visayas. The membership of the *Katipunan* was estimated at 30,000 men.<sup>21</sup> Fighting, however, was inconclusive and by 1897, an *illustado*, Emilio Aguinaldo, having gained prominence because of his successes against the Spaniards, had replaced Bonifacio as leader of the revolution.<sup>22</sup> In the stalemate that ensued, the colonial authorities convinced Aguinaldo to agree to an armistice on the promise of reform. After much debate, Aguinaldo agreed and left for exile in Hong Kong, as part of the agreement.

Leon Maria Guerrero in his biography of Rizal claims that it was only during the revolution of 1896 that the natives began calling themselves as 'Filipinos', a term normally used to refer to Spaniards born on the islands.<sup>23</sup> Previous to these, the natives

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<sup>19</sup> These priests were Fathers Gomez, Burgos and Zamora.

<sup>20</sup> *Kagalangalangand, Katastaasang Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan* or Honorable and Supreme Society of the Sons the People.

<sup>21</sup> Phil. Army 100 Years

<sup>22</sup> Bonifacio was tried and executed after a political falling out with Aguinaldo.

<sup>23</sup> Leon Maria Guerrero. *The First Filipino*. 2000, Guerrero Publishing, Makati, Philippines.

identified themselves according to tribe and language, e.g., *Tagalog*, *Visayan* or *Pampango*. To the Spaniards, they were either *indio* or *moro*.

Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Spain's developmental policy towards the islands was one of extracting the greatest gain at the least cost. Local development, including that of the natives, was kept only to a bare minimum. Education, for example, was limited to the elite. This explains why Spanish is not as widely spoken in the Philippines as in other former Spanish colonies. With the growth of global trade led by the mercantile nations of England and the United States, agricultural development of the islands improved as did the wealth and patriotic aspirations of the natives. Nevertheless, except for the *Moros*, it was under a colonial power that the first semblance of consolidation of the islands was achieved.

## **B. AMERICAN COLONY**

When the Spanish-American war broke out in 1898, American naval forces under Commodore Dewey easily defeated the rusting Spanish fleet in Manila Bay. Dewey's victory revived Aguinaldo's stalled revolution. Momentarily without any presence on land, American officials initially supported Aguinaldo's drive to surround *Intramuros*, the walled section of Manila, while awaiting the arrival of U.S. troops. Unknown to the Filipinos, the Americans and the Spaniards worked out an arrangement that would allow Spain "to save face and to satisfy a medieval code of honor." The Spaniards also feared that the Filipinos would massacre the inhabitants if allowed into the city. This arrangement would leave out the Filipino revolutionary army that had ringed the city while American troops were still in transit from California. Through a promise of more and better arms, which later turned out to be false, American commanders convinced Filipino troops surrounding *Intramuros* to hand over their positions to American forces. On August 13, 1898 the Filipino army watched on the sidelines as Intramuros, the Walled City, and the object of all their sacrifice, fell into American hands – a sham battle between 'civilized' nations.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Phil. Army 100 Years.

Earlier in June of that year Aguinaldo declared independence although this was not recognized by the United States. With *Intramuros* now occupied and about 25,000 US troops in the Philippines, the Americans demanded that the Filipinos vacate their positions around Manila and limit their approach to the city only up to certain points. Fighting inevitably broke out between the US Army and the *Katipunan* in February 1899. At this time the *Katipunan* numbered about 20,000, with only 5,000 armed with firearms. The rest were armed with bolos, spears and bows and arrows.

The war that followed was marked by cruelty and brutality with the Filipinos on the losing end. The *Katipunan* was quickly shattered as a conventional force and in November 1899 the Filipinos shifted to guerilla warfare. In conducting an anti-guerilla campaign, the Americans applied methods that had severe effects on the civilian populace. Entire villages were burned and their inhabitants forcibly relocated into restricted 'concentration camps' to prevent them from supporting the guerillas. Tens of thousands died in these camps.

What the Americans would call the Philippine Insurrection (the Filipinos called it the Philippine-American War) was formally declared over by the new colonial authorities in July 1902. It cost the lives of 4,234 Americans. Filipino deaths are estimated at 20,000 *Katipuneros* and between 200,000 to 1 million civilians. Manuel Arellano Remondo writes in 1908 that the population had decreased by 1 million 'due to the wars'.<sup>25</sup>

## **1. The Pacification Campaign**

Revolts against the Americans continued. Some of these resembled the earlier revolts against the Spaniards in that they were led by quasi-religious leaders. Most of

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<sup>25</sup> Manuel Arellano Remondo, *General Geography of the Philippine Islands*, 1908. Typographic College of Santo Tomas, Manila. P. 15, cited in "Statistics: The Spanish Language in the Philippines", *Circulo Hispano-Filipino* at <http://de.geocities.com/hispanofilipino/Articles/Estadisticas02Eng.html>. The figure of 200,000 is from Gregorio Zaide. *Philippine Political and Cultural History*, 1972. Manila: Philippine Education Company.

these were remnants of the *Katipunan* who were declared bandits by the American colonial authorities. The Americans also dealt the Moros aspirations for a separate state a fatal blow in 1913 in the Battle of Bud Bagsak. During the 1930s the *Sakdal* revolt erupted in Central Luzon. It was the first uprising that was based on agrarian unrest. The authorities had to call out the Philippine Constabulary, a paramilitary force, to quell the *Sakdal* revolt. By 1915 the entire archipelago was incorporated into a single territory until granted independence by the United States in 1946.

## **2. Effects of the American Occupation**

Under American rule universal education was introduced and English became the unifying language that further bound the different parts of the Philippines, including the *Moros*, under a single authority. The influence of the Catholic Church was considerably reduced. All the remaining armed opposition to American rule, whether revolutionary remnants or rebels-turned-bandits, were slowly eliminated. The Americans introduced participatory democracy. A National Assembly was convened from popularly elected candidates. The Americans left intact, however, the local elite who had continued to perform their roles as collaborators with the colonizers.

## **C. WORLD WAR II**

After the defeat of the Allied forces in Bataan and Corregidor, many Filipinos simply fell back on their revolutionary heritage and joined the underground movements against the Japanese. The Philippines, along with all of Southeast Asia, fell within Japan's East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. The most effective of these guerilla organizations was the *Hukbong Bayan Laban sa mga Hapon* (People's Anti-Japanese Army or *Hukbalahap*) or simply, the *Huks*. Benedict Kerkvliet in his book *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines* wrote that many guerilla organizations sprang up all over the islands but the *Huks* in Central Luzon were among the most active and effective anti-Japanese guerilla forces in the Philippines, if not the

entire Pacific.<sup>26</sup> The *Huks* did not have to follow Allied directives. One of these directives advised restraint on the part of guerilla groups to avoid Japanese reprisals on the populace. One effect of the WWII guerilla movements was the proliferation of firearms all over the Philippines. The Allies continued to supply weapons to guerilla bands all over the islands and many of these were used for other purposes like the elimination of political rivals and personal vendettas.

As in the rest of Asia, the defeat of Western colonizers by an Asian power shattered the myth of invincibility of the colonial masters. The spectacle, deliberately staged by the Japanese, of former European masters reduced to abject conditions remained indelible in the minds of many colonial subjects. Europeans *can* be defeated. After World War II, in quick succession, the nations in Southeast Asia emerged as independent states. The Philippines was no exception. Its march to independence had started in 1935 and was only interrupted by World War II.

In July 4, 1946, with its capital city still in ruins and its populace still dazed by the violence and destruction of the liberation, the Philippines achieved independence.

Some historians report that in the colonial history of the Philippines more than 200 revolts occurred.<sup>27</sup> It is evident that violent resistance against central authority is common enough in Philippine history that every single generation of Filipinos has either participated in or had knowledge of a revolt during his lifetime. This historical record of revolts and uprisings created what Tan called the Filipinos' "revolutionary heritage".<sup>28</sup> Beneath the veneer of unity lies the fragile Filipino national project. It provides some explanation for the frequency of revolts in the islands and the propensity of its inhabitants to challenge or ignore central government.

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<sup>26</sup> Benedict J. Kerkvliet. *"The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines"*. 1977. University of California Press, LA.

<sup>27</sup> Jose Maria Sison, *Philippine Society and Revolution*. Communist Party of the Philippines publication, 1970. Due to the underground nature of the Communist Party of the Philippines at the time Sison's works were published, and even up to today, no publishing data except the date of publications was available. Sison himself wrote under the pseudonym Amado Guerrero. Most of Sison's works are available at the CPP website: <http://www.philippinerevolution.org/cpp/index.shtml>

<sup>28</sup> Tan, op cit.

The colonial authorities, both Spanish and American, brooked no internal dissent. Rebellions were suppressed and its perpetrators were severely punished. The American occupation, for example, included a period called the pacification campaign which lasted up to 1913. It is no accident that during this period Philippine society reached a level of development and sophistication that surpassed any of its regional neighbors in the then Far East.

### III. THE COMMUNIST INSURGENCY

Communism as a political ideology was introduced in the Philippines during the 1930's and found many adherents among the impoverished tenant farmers of Central Luzon and the small but growing number of workers in Manila. The local communist movement would always present itself as a mass-based, nationalistic, anti-imperialist movement. In its early stages its leaders were heavily influenced by global developments such as the communist victories in China and Vietnam and the wars of national liberation in former colonial possessions. The communist-led insurgency continues to thrive because the Government has not adequately addressed the economic and social conditions that are its root causes.

On two previous occasions, leaders of the local communist movements seriously misjudged the existence of so-called revolutionary situations. In 1950, the *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP) “concluded that a revolutionary situation existed” based on an analysis of the U.S. economy made by a top Soviet economist.<sup>29</sup> This analysis argued that the U.S. economy was crumbling and that U.S. imperialism was about to collapse. In 1970, Sison wrote: “We are in an era when imperialism is heading for total collapse and socialism is marching toward world victory.”<sup>30</sup>

#### A. THE HUK REBELLION

The *Huk* rebellion, which lasted from 1946 to 1950, was the first widespread armed rebellion in an independent Philippines and it had an ideological component identified with communism. According to Benedict Kerkvliet, the deterioration of traditional ties between landlords and peasants in Central Luzon enabled the *Huk* rebellion.<sup>31</sup> Modernization was the cause. By adopting ‘modern’ values and methods, landlords began to neglect what the peasants believed to be their duty to the “little

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<sup>29</sup> Kerkvliet, p. 225

<sup>30</sup> Sison, 1970.

<sup>31</sup> Kerkvliet, op cit., observes that even Sison, founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines, misses this detail in his work *Philippine Society and Revolution*.



people”, such as giving aid and assistance. Instead, the landlords demanded interests for loans and formal contracts for business transactions from the tenants. The tenant farmers of Central Luzon did not seek a redistribution of the land; this was the idea of the PKP (Philippine Communist Party). They wanted a return to the old patron-client system. Ominously, population growth in Central Luzon made arable land less and less available. In the province of Nueva Ecija the population more than doubled in 30 years.<sup>32</sup> The rebellion grew out of the *Sakdal* peasant-based agrarian unrest in pre-war Central Luzon. Many *Huks* had been members of the *Sakdal* and the other peasant movements before the war. The major factor that made a difference between pre-war peasant unrest and the *Huk* rebellion was the availability of firearms left over from World War II. By the end of 1944 there were between 10,000 to 12,000 *Huk* guerillas organized into 76 squadrons.<sup>33</sup>

The Philippine government, with extensive US military assistance, waged a successful two-pronged campaign against the *Huks*. It was led by the charismatic Ramon Magsaysay, who was later to become the President. Magsaysay’s campaign, which employed military operations and attraction programs applied in combination, effectively defeated the *Huks* as a military force by 1951.<sup>34</sup> This was an early example of the fight-and-develop strategy and evidently heavily influenced subsequent administrations. In truth, the strategy was more fight than develop because the attraction program was merely icing on the cake since the number of beneficiaries were only a fraction of the entire *Huk* movement. The U. S. assistance, for example, was purely military in nature. But government propaganda made sure that every case of a *Huk* beneficiary was widely heard.<sup>35</sup>

Magsaysay’s efforts included military reform and a policy of attraction for the *Huks*. He re-organized and streamlined the armed forces and sacked non-performing commanders while rewarded those who did well. He created the Economic Development Corps (EDCOR) which included a resettlement and homestead program. Many

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<sup>32</sup> Kerkvliet, p. 19

<sup>33</sup> Equivalent to company

<sup>34</sup> Kerkvliet, Op cit.

<sup>35</sup> Kerkvliet cites Jose Crisol, who worked under Magsaysay, for this admission.

surrendered Huks were relocated to Mindanao and given land. Ironically, this influx of *Huk* (Christian) settlers into Mindanao would exacerbate the brewing Muslim-Christian conflict on the island.

## **B. THE CPP/NPA**

The CPP and the NPA are direct descendants of the earlier PKP and *Huks*.<sup>36</sup> Like the *Huks* before them, the leaders of the CPP determined in the late 1960's that a revolutionary situation existed in the Philippines. Developments elsewhere, in Vietnam and China (in the midst of its Cultural Revolution) in particular, prompted Filipino communists to consider the possibilities for their own revolution. The split between the PKP and the CPP was due to differences in ideology and method which reflected the split within the Communist world little understood in the West at that time. The PKP was Moscow-oriented and adhered to a proletariat-based insurrection that would take place in the cities. The CPP followed Mao's (Beijing) theory of agrarian (countryside) and peasant-based protracted armed struggle. Further, after the defeat of the Huks, the PKP opted for parliamentary struggle. The NPA broke away from the Huks and became the CPP's military arm.

### **1. A Deliberate Strategy of Protracted War**

From its founding, the NPA has openly declared that its strategy was to wage a protracted people's war. In 1974 Jose Maria Sison, founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines, wrote: "Our people's war is protracted. It shall take *a long period of time* to change the balance of forces between us and the enemy."<sup>37</sup> This strategy in itself does not fully explain why the communist insurgency has lasted so long because the prospect of a 30-plus years struggle would have been a daunting prospect to any revolutionary.

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<sup>36</sup> Many of the founding members of the CPP and the NPA were former PKP and HMB members. Among these were Jose Maria Sison, founder of the CPP, and Bernabe Buscayno, founder of the NPA.

<sup>37</sup> Jose Maria Sison. *Our Urgent Tasks*. 1974. Communist Party of the Philippines publication. Italics supplied.

Nevertheless it provides context to the hard line stance taken by the communist in transactions with the Government.

In 1988, the CPP anniversary statement had read: “The key to total victory *within the next ten years* is the militant all-sided participation and support of the broad masses of the people in their tens of millions and through organizations whose membership run into millions.”<sup>38</sup> (italics supplied).

Ten years later, with victory still un-attained, the anniversary message read: “The domestic semi-colonial and semi-feudal ruling system and the world capitalist system are now in the throes of an unprecedented crisis.”<sup>39</sup>

During the 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding in December 26, 2002, the CPP announced that they would “outlast President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo” and that “the CPP and the revolutionary movement have become stronger and are in a more favorable position to advance in large strides, rapidly and comprehensively in the coming years” and that the NPA would “carry out more numerous, more frequent and bigger tactical offensives against the AFP and other fascist machineries in 2003.”<sup>40</sup> Peace negotiations between the government and the communists have been an on-again, off-again affair for years but have largely been inconclusive. The NPA continues its attacks on civilian government installations and recalcitrant ‘tax payers’ all over the country. While the level of violence has not approached 1985, the year of heaviest casualties, NPA related violence have been on the increase. The US and some European nations have tagged the CPP a terrorist organization.

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<sup>38</sup> Communist Party of the Philippines statement on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its re-establishment: <http://www.philippinerevolution.org/cpp/astm/1988/1988e03.shtml>

<sup>39</sup> 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Statement of the CP of the Philippines at : <http://cpa2.netfirms.com/Struggle/June99/14.htm>

<sup>40</sup> Statement of Gregorio “Ka Roger” Rosal, Spokesperson, Communist Party of the Philippines, on December 25, 2002 at <http://www.philippinerevolution.org/cgi-bin/statements/statements.pl?author=kr;date=021225;language=rel>

Today, with the Soviet Union gone and China reaping the rewards of free-market reforms, these statements appear quaint, even ludicrous. Yet these official party declarations are consistent with the protracted revolutionary war strategy.

## **2. The Influence of 3<sup>rd</sup> Parties**

The NPA is almost totally independent, self-supporting and self-directed. Except for ideological support from ‘fraternal’ communist parties, almost all rebel weapons and revenues are generated in-country. This independence is both a blessing and a bane. Sison recognized the proximity of the Philippines to the “great invincible political rear made up of the People’s Republic of China,” but NPA attempts to smuggle in arms from China ended in failure.<sup>41</sup> There have been no further efforts or attempts to smuggle in arms either from China or North Korea.

When the NPA sent a delegation to Beijing in 1973 to negotiate for arms assistance, Beijing required the Filipino communists to keep a low profile and limited their contact with others. This was a great disappointment to Sison who hoped to use the event as a propaganda coup. It was the only instance of a 3<sup>rd</sup> party dictating on the NPA.<sup>42</sup>

Lack of a major and reliable source of arms is serious obstacle that prevents NPA victory over the AFP. Time alone will not provide this crucial requirement which was not a problem with the Chinese and Vietnamese conflicts. The NPA intends to use the protracted duration to generate military superiority by smuggling in firearms, by capturing war material from the AFP or by causing massive defections. The empirical evidence indicates that this is not happening.

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<sup>41</sup> Gregg Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the op cit*. In mid-1972 the NPA loaded a fishing trawler, renamed the *Karagatan*, with 1,200 automatic rifles, ammunition and anti-tank weapons from China and attempted to land it surreptitiously in the Philippines. The effort was discovered and thwarted. Another effort in January 1974 also ended in failure. Since then no arms smuggling has been reported.

<sup>42</sup> Jones, *op cit*.

Referring to civil war duration Paul Collier argues that “economic agendas appear to be central” to civil conflict and that “it is likely that some groups are benefiting from the conflict and that these groups therefore have some interest in initiating and sustaining it”.<sup>43</sup> This is true in the case of the NPA because it has ‘discovered’ other sources of revenue which can only be fully exploited under conditions of civil conflict, like criminal activities and exercising rebel sovereignty.

The NPA has resorted to criminal activities like kidnapping, robbery and extortion. NPA spokesman, Gregorio Rosal, claims that the NPA intensified its extortion activities after the United States and the European Union declared the movement a terrorist organization and froze its funds in 2002.<sup>44</sup> In February 2003, Rodolfo S. Salas, who headed the NPA from 1976 until his arrest in 1986 admitted that in 1986 the Executive Committee of the Party’s Central Committee had directed the NPA General Command to resort to “criminal acts to raise funds”.<sup>45</sup>

Ironically, the NPA also collects permit-to-campaign fees from electoral candidates campaigning in their influenced areas. In July 2003, the NPA spokesman in Abra province in Luzon announced that it was collecting permit-to-campaign fees for the 2004 elections.<sup>46</sup> Bus and other transportation companies are lucrative sources of funds since their assets are vulnerable to rebel attacks. In the province of Negros Occidental the NPA burned nine busses and bombed a cellular telephone station in 2002 and 2003.<sup>47</sup> Bus companies are assessed approximately P5 million a year. From the gold mines in Davao del Norte the NPA collects from one mining firm alone an annual subsidy of P 1.5 billion (about \$27 million).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Collier, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Palangchao, Harley in *SunStar on Line*, 19 July 2003 issue.  
<http://www.sunstar.com.ph/static/net/2003/07/19/would.be.bets.told.don.t.pay.npa.campaign.fee.html> - accessed 29 October 2003.

<sup>45</sup> Rodolfo Salas statement in *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 10 February 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Harley Palangchao, in *Manila Times*, 26 July 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Gilbert Bayoran in *The Visayan Daily Star*, 23 August 2003.

<sup>48</sup> Information from AFP intelligence source.

These resource generating activities makes the NPA relatively free of 3<sup>rd</sup> party influence.

Twice negotiations between the government and the CPP/NPA were conducted. Negotiations were immediately attempted following Marcos' downfall. But in 1987 the CPP/NPA broke off negotiations when a farmers' demonstration ended in violence which claimed 13 lives.<sup>49</sup> In 2001, it was the government's turn to break off negotiations when the NPA assassinated two congressmen with 'blood debts'. Since then the CPP/NPA was tagged as a terrorist organization by the United States and some European nations. Although both sides profess to be willing, negotiations have not been resumed. At present (2003) preparations are being made to resume negotiations with the NPA under the auspices of Norwegian government.

## **C. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

Aside from negotiations, the government has attempted to address the root causes of the insurgency. Its counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy is imbedded in what it calls its social reform agenda. Together with military operations, land reform and poverty alleviation are the components of this program to eliminate the root causes of the communist-led rebellion.

### **1. Land Reform**

The fundamental flaw of any land reform program in the Philippines is that there is increasingly insufficient land to be distributed to an increasing number of farmer-beneficiaries. Only about a third of the country's 30 million hectares are classified as arable and the country's population growth is among the highest in the world. There are an estimated 12 million agricultural workers in the country. When Marcos was ousted in 1986, the government of Corazon Aquino vowed to make land reform the centerpiece of

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<sup>49</sup> Darwin G. Almojalar, "Remembering the Mendiola Massacre" in *The Manila Times*, January 26, 2003 at <http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2003/jan/26/weekend/20030126wek4.html>

her administration. What emerged as the Comprehensive Land Reform Law (CARL) in 1987 was a watered down version emasculated by landlord influence in the legislature. Initially the program identified 10.3 million hectares of land that was distributable; this was later corrected during the Ramos administration to 8.06 million. Accounting for actual ownership is one problem which besets the CARP program. From 1986 to 1999, 2.97 million hectares were distributed to 2.1 million farmer-beneficiaries. Whatever the scheme or scale of distribution, the land-to-the-tiller strategy remains a powerful tool against an agrarian unrest. Considering that the Philippines is not a socialist society, nor revolutionary or dictatorial, this achievement is still significant.<sup>50</sup> However, it is not sufficient to douse agrarian restiveness.

## **2. Poverty Alleviation**

Sustained economic growth was identified by government planners as the main tool against poverty. In order to reduce poverty from 36% in 1994 to 30% by 1998, annual GDP growth had to be at least 5.8%. The Asian financial crisis of 1997 derailed this plan. Progress in poverty alleviation has been modest. In fact, the number of poor increased from 4.6 million in 1985 to 5.24 million in 2000.<sup>51</sup> Poverty alleviation has been hampered by political instability, poor peace and order conditions and external economic shocks. This is a component of the Government's COIN campaign that has not been successful. The case of the Bondoc peninsula illustrates why fight-and-develop as a strategy tends to fail against the NPA.

The Bondoc Peninsula is located in Quezon province, about 180 kilometers south of Manila. Because of government neglect, the area has poor infrastructure and poverty is rampant. The NPA found it ideal as a guerilla sanctuary. In 1988, the government, with assistance from the German government, launched a development project that would improve the road system and increase agricultural productivity. The NPA felt threatened

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<sup>50</sup> Land Reform in the Philippines, Land Research Action Network. – April 9, 2003.  
<http://www.landaction.org/display.php?article=74>

<sup>51</sup> Orbeta quotes Reyes, 2000.

by the road project, concluding that it would benefit military forces more than the local inhabitants. Through the National Democratic Front, it lobbied with the German government against the road project and succeeded. The funds were diverted towards agrarian reform, coastal resource management, health care, and enterprise development. It did not include roads.

A special report by The Manila Times in October 2002 quotes an official of the National Economic and Development Authority as saying that:

...all efforts in increasing agricultural production through new technologies are hampered by inaccessibility of inputs and markets for produce, major difficulty in marketing agricultural production due to lack of farm-to-market roads and lack of irrigation facilities.<sup>52</sup>

The extent of NPA extortion, which they call “revolutionary taxation”, has imposed an additional burden on business and discouraged would-be investors, keeping the area under developed and in poverty.

Concludes the same report:

The communist insurgency is the single biggest reason why Quezon province remains a backwater in terms of economic growth and development. Potential business and development investors are wary of putting money in Quezon despite its vast potential because of the rebels’ strong presence there and the ‘revolutionary’ taxes they exact (sic).

But other developments also work in the communists’ favor. From 1970 to 1996, the year before the Asian financial crisis, while the average annual per capita GDP growth for Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia was 5.4%, the Philippines averaged .1% - the lowest in East Asia. Sødal calls this performance a “catastrophe” and attributes it to “severe security problems”. The causal direction cannot be clearly established because in the decade of 1960-1970 when the both insurgencies were still

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<sup>52</sup> Dave L. Llorito and Meryl Mae Marcon, “Bondoc Peninsula’s growth stunted by insurgency”, *The Manila Times Special Report*, posted Saturday, October 23, 2002.



non-existent, the Philippines already had a lower GDP growth per capita than the three other countries (2.1% versus 5.1%), except Indonesia (1.1%).<sup>53</sup> Wealth distribution has not improved either. From 1985 to 2000, the share of the poorest quintile has decreased from 4.8% to 4.7% while the share of the richest quintile has increased from 51.2% to 54.8%.<sup>54</sup>

Aniceto O. Orbeta, Jr. of the Philippine Institute for Development Studies attributes part of this increase in poverty to the country's frenetic population growth which, at 2.3%, is among the highest in the world. In 1970, the Philippine population stood at 35 million; by year-end 2003 this figure is estimated to be 81 million, and by 2004 will be at 85 million.<sup>55</sup> Thus population growth clearly outstrips the modest gains in economic performance.

Economic difficulties notwithstanding, many Filipinos still do not see the NPA as the solution to their difficulties. In late 2002 a survey conducted by Pulse Asia, an opinion-monitoring firm, revealed that 62% of respondents had no trust in the CPP and NPA while 68% desired the continuation of peace talks between the government and the communists.<sup>56</sup> After 1992 the CPP is no longer an illegal organization but it has not established a legal presence like a political party. Candidates with known leftist leanings run for office under a different party or under the party-list system.

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<sup>53</sup> Sigbjørn Sødal. *Capitalism, Communism and Confucius? Some Refelctions on Asian Growth and Crisis*. Research supported by the institutional collaboration between Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia and Agder University, Norway and Agder Maritime Research Foundation, Norway. December 15, 2000. Cites data from Barro and Lee (1994) and World Bank.

<sup>54</sup> Aniceto C.Orbeta, Jr. *Population and Poverty: A Review of the Links, Evidence and Implications for the Philippines*. Paper prepared for the 2002 Population National Congress, INNOTECH Building, Diliman, Q.C., 29 November 2002.

<sup>55</sup> Philippine National Statistics Office mid-range estimate.  
<http://www.census.gov.ph/data/quickstat/index.html> - accessed 1 November 2003.

<sup>56</sup> Sol Jose Vanzi, "Poll: 70% of Filipinos Want Talks with CPP", in Newsflash, Manila, December 23, 2002. - <http://www.newsflash.org/2002/12/hl/hl017187.htm> - accessed 30 October 2003.

### 3. The Military Campaign

In terms of measurable output alone, i.e., enemy killed and firearms gained from the enemy, the results of the military campaign against the NPA have been favorable to the Government. During the six-year period from 1997 to 2002, AFP records show that there were 2,886 engagements with the NPA; 75% of these engagements were initiated by government forces. Since rebel personnel and materiel losses are not readily replaceable, these losses must weigh heavily on NPA strength. (See Appendix A – Results of Military Operations Against the NPA and the Moros)

In the early years of the conflict, the AFP adopted a direct and reactive strategy that aimed to secure the villages (*barangays*) from NPA infiltration and the adoption of search-and-destroy campaigns against the guerillas<sup>57</sup>. The strength of the guerillas rose dramatically from nine squads in 1969 to about 24,000 members in 1987.<sup>58</sup>

In 1988, the AFP adopted a strategy that focused on the guerilla's political infrastructure in the *barangays*.<sup>59</sup> Actual fighting took secondary importance. From a high of 8,496 villages in 1987, NPA influence dropped to 984 villages in 1993, a mere 2% of all the villages nationwide. Likewise, NPA guerilla strength had dropped to about 6,000 in 1995.<sup>60</sup>

The weakness of this approach was that once the soldiers moved on to the next village, the *barangay* relapsed back under NPA control because of the absence of government efforts to sustain the gains – ‘development’ did not follow ‘fight’. This led to frustration among the soldiers who felt that they alone were holding up against the NPA.

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<sup>57</sup> These campaign plans were called Letters of Instruction (LOIs) *Mamamayan* (Citizen) and *Katatagan* (Stability) and were based largely on the US pattern in Vietnam. Civic action was central to these campaigns.

<sup>58</sup> Corpus, p. 26.

<sup>59</sup> LOI *Lambat Bitag* (Net Trap)

<sup>60</sup> PhilArmy 100 Years

Not surprisingly the protracted COIN campaign led to the politicization of the troops. Coming from the same background as the *barangay* people they were trying to influence, many soldiers came to realize that, to some extent, the NPA was right - it was the Government, especially the politicians, who failed in their duty of providing for the public good. The series of coups against the government in 1986, 1987 and 1989 were driven in part by soldier impatience with the pace of reform in government. The leaders of the latest military mutiny in July 2003 cited corruption, micromanagement and ineffective government as reasons their action.

By 1991, the communists conducted a re-assessment and launched a rectification campaign in 1994. The larger NPA units were dispersed and engagements with government troops were avoided. The guerillas concentrated on consolidating and strengthening their mass bases. By 2000 their strength was up to 11,000. It is difficult to account for the NPA's recovery. Part of their rectification effort was developing countermeasures against the SOT. The NPA could also have benefited from the continuing adverse economic conditions in the countryside as a result of the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

#### **D. STRATEGIES**

Only the Government's military campaigns shows favorable results and yet the insurgency continues to grow. Yet it is not the ineffectiveness of military operations but the insufficiency of effort in this field that is to blame.

Arreguin-Toft proposes that strategic interaction, i.e., how protagonists respond to each other, determines outcome in asymmetric conflicts.<sup>61</sup> Weak actors tend to win in asymmetric conflicts when they apply an indirect strategy against the strong actor's direct strategy. He defines direct strategy as that targeting an enemy's *capacity* to fight such as his troops, weapons or logistics, while indirect strategy targets an enemy's *will* to fight such as his sources of food or popular support. But there is one caveat: a weak actor's

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<sup>61</sup> Ivan Arreguin-Toft. "How the Weak Win Wars. A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict". *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 1, Summer 2001.

success in applying an indirect defensive strategy assumes a certain restraint on the part of the strong (government) actor.

The effects of democratic restraint on AFP counter-guerilla operations are in the forms of political pressure, constitutional restriction and the influence of non-government organizations. The Philippines' democratic system holds security forces accountable for their actions to directly elected political leaders. The AFP is restrained from applying barbarism which Arreguin-Toft defines simply as the systematic violation of the laws of war in pursuit of a military or political objective. Article XIII of the Philippine Constitution specifically recognizes human rights and creates a commission that shall "investigate, on its own or on complaint by any party, all forms of human rights violations involving civil and political rights".<sup>62</sup> Population and resource control are a milder form of direct strategy against guerillas. By limiting the guerillas' access to the local population (which provides food, information, weapons and recruits to the guerillas) security forces are striking at the guerillas' ability to wage war. Neither control of the population nor of food supplies is being applied by the AFP.

In May 2003, Senator Aquilino Pimentel urged the AFP to "review and modify its tactics" and "restrain itself from unleashing its bombs and artillery fire on terrorist targets if there is a high risk of hitting innocent civilians." The government, Pimentel argues, cannot "use the same means adopted by terrorists" or it "will be guilty of state-sponsored terrorism."<sup>63</sup> Although Pimentel was referring to operations against the MILF, an ever greater degree of congressional oversight is applied to operations against the NPA.

The March 2003 report of the US State Department Bureau of Human Rights, Democracy and Labor states that human rights violations in the Philippines were perpetrated by both the government security forces and the rebel organizations.<sup>64</sup> The human rights issue is viewed by many in the AFP as a deliberate weapon applied by the

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<sup>62</sup> Paragraph 1, Section 18, Article XIII, The Philippine Constitution.

<sup>63</sup> Aquilino Pimentel quoted in *Minda News* a publication of the Mindanao News and Information Cooperative Center, Vol. II, No. 22, 29 May 2003.

<sup>64</sup> Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2002, U.S. Department of State, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, released on March 31, 2003

NPA to blunt legitimate military operations. This perception, together with inadequate legal support for the counterinsurgency effort, has led to extrajudicial abuses by the security forces.<sup>65</sup> The Anti-Subversion law which made the CPP illegal, was rescinded in 1992. Troops engaged in searches for rebel weapons and suspects have to go through the standard police process of applying for a search warrant. Even combat engagements with guerilla bands have to be treated as a crime requiring the gathering of evidence. To many in the AFP, these legal requirements are simply inadequate to fight a rebellion. Nevertheless, the AFP continues to be accountable to the Commander-in-Chief and the legislature who are all civilians and chosen by direct election.

#### **E. NPA DECLINE EXPLAINED**

From 1969 to 1987, the NPA grew prodigiously from a mere 50 guerillas to more than 25,000. From there its strength dropped to about 6,000 in 1995 and today (2003) it claims strength of about 13,000. This growth is erratic and does not present a steady trend towards “uniting the many to oppose the few and isolate and destroy the enemy”.<sup>66</sup>

There are at least three other alternative explanations for the decline of NPA strength from 1987 to 1994 other than AFP action. First, Marcos was deposed and democracy restored. Up to 1986 the NPA was growing at 20% a year and captured NPA documents revealed that the rebels were anticipating a shift to the next phase of the communist armed struggle. With Marcos gone and in his place an immensely popular Corazon Aquino, the communists lost an important hate object. Broader political participation defused some of the dissatisfaction that the NPA relied on to fuel their rebellion. Second, the Soviet empire collapsed discrediting communism as a viable ideology. The implosion of the USSR, the epicenter of the worldwide communist movement, caught many by surprise, including the NPA. Doubts began to set in

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<sup>65</sup> The Philippines does not have an internal security act like some of its neighbors. The Communist Party has been legalized after the Anti-Subversion Law was rescinded in 1992.

<sup>66</sup> Sison, op cit.

regarding the validity of their cause. Third, the NPA suffered a self-destructive internal witch hunt which resulted in the torture and execution of hundreds of its members.<sup>67</sup>

The CPP/NPA have not given up their struggle to overthrow the existing democratic system by armed struggle, but if their movement is to succeed, the communist have to overcome the fundamental problems where to source weapons or war material, where to establish an utterly safe sanctuary and how to develop solid popular support. These were the very same obstacles that have confronted the MNLF and the *Katipunan* before them.

Efforts to generate arms from government forces have met with dismal results, with the NPA losing more to the government forces. During the period 1997 to 2002, the AFP recorded gains of 2,928 high powered firearms versus losing 799 to the NPA<sup>68</sup>. Despite these, however, the NPA claims that it has 13,500 guerillas organized into 27 battalions and active in 800 towns and 70 provinces.<sup>69</sup>

Another source which the NPA hope to tap is massive defections from the AFP. This has not happened although there are reports of pilferage and individual sales by military personnel, but still not sufficient for a qualitative shift in the military balance. There are also cases of individual defections but some of these involved soldiers evading punishment for violations of military regulations.

Many successful guerilla movements had recourse to a sanctuary area where the rebels could rest and refit which was invulnerable to pursuing government forces. The Chinese communist had this sanctuary in Yennan; the North Vietnamese enjoyed the protection of China and the Soviet Union; the FARC in Colombia regularly cross over into Venezuela. The NPA does not have such an area although they have always tried to create it. In the past it has attempted to establish sanctuaries in the Marag Valley and the Bondoc Peninsula, both in Luzon. In both instances, a determined and sustained

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<sup>67</sup> Jones, op cit.

<sup>68</sup> Philippine Army data.

<sup>69</sup> Diego Wadagan quoted by Harley Palangchao in *Manila Times*, 26 July 2003.

government effort to dismantle rebel support infrastructure seriously degraded rebel strength in those areas.

The NPA continues to exist and although it is not strong enough to defeat the government it acts as a millstone on Filipino society in general. The fundamental causes of the insurgency – poverty and injustice as a result of socio-political and economic weaknesses require long-term solutions which have not been made. The NPA itself admits that for as long as these fundamental causes are not corrected, the communist insurgency will remain. The NPA's adoption of a protracted war strategy explains their willingness to forego negotiations and concessions in exchange for a more complete revolutionary victory in the future. Finally, their total independence of 3<sup>rd</sup> party influence gives them the freedom and flexibility to pursue any course of action they wish – including continuation of their struggle.

#### **IV. THE SECESSIONIST MOVEMENT IN MINDANAO**

The conflict between Muslims and Christians in Mindanao has historical and contemporary causes. Competition for land between the original Muslim inhabitants and recent Christian settlers was the fundamental cause of what the Government calls the “Mindanao Problem”. Since there was historical animosity between the Muslims and the Christians, it was not difficult for violence to erupt. However, it was an ill-conceived plot to infiltrate neighboring Sabah, in North Borneo, that ignited the present conflict. The Philippine Government, first under Marcos and then under Aquino, Ramos and Estrada, have applied a mix of military, diplomatic, political and economic measures to resolve the problem. Recent developments show promise. Unlike the NPA, the *Moros* are heavily influenced by 3<sup>rd</sup> parties. Militarily, the MNLF was a defeated force by 1984, but deft negotiations and careful orchestration by the MNLF under Nur Misuari and lapses and errors on the Government gave the rebels a new lease on life.

##### **A. THE *MORO* REBELLION**

The Muslims secessionist movement was caused by economic, political and social marginalization of the earlier inhabitants of Mindanao as a result of the continued migration of Christians. This demographic shift began during the Commonwealth period under the Americans and increased after World War II. It created friction between the new settlers and the Muslims. According to Thomas McKenna, the number of Christian migrants in Central Mindanao soared from .7 million in 1948 to 2.3 million in 1970.<sup>74</sup> By 1990 the population of Mindanao was only less than 17% Muslim and about 5% nationwide. The new settlers set about acquiring land and the Muslims, who considered land as communal property, saw a steady erosion of their domain. Indifferent to the legal nuances of land ownership, many Muslims were often outwitted by the more savvy settlers. Since the government established and enforced the laws for land ownership, it

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<sup>74</sup>Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim separatism in the Philippines: Meaningful autonomy or endless war?* Asian Social Issues Program, Asia Source. <http://www.asiasource.org/asip/mckenna.cfm> - assessed November 9, 2003.



was seen as an instrument of Christian encroachment. By the mid-1960's the increasing tension had broken out into occasional violence.

Although relations between Christian settlers and Muslims in Mindanao were growing increasingly tense, it was a bungled, ill-conceived and supposedly clandestine plot to destabilize the Malaysian state of Sabah that broke the camel's back.

The Philippine claim to Sabah is a curious twist in history. It stems from the Sultan of Sulu's historical claim to the territory which was leased to a couple of English entrepreneurs in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and eventually absorbed into the Malay Federation. In 1963 a UN commission ruled that the inhabitants of Sabah freely expressed their desire to be part of Malaysia.<sup>75</sup> This was disputed by both the Philippines and Indonesia. Indonesia launched an infiltration effort that came to be known as the *konfrontasi*. For the Philippines, it was to be *Jabidah*.

In 1968 a scandal erupted upon the discovery of a secret plot within the Armed Forces of the Philippines to infiltrate saboteurs and instigate destabilization in the Malaysian state of Sabah in Borneo. The Philippines supported the Sultan of Sulu's ancestral claim to Sabah. The scandal arose when it was discovered that trainees for the operation, who were all Muslim youths, were summarily executed because of disciplinary problems. The incident occurred in Corregidor Island. One of the trainees survived and political opponents of Marcos brought him forward to tell his story to Congress.<sup>76</sup>

No other single event has had such an impact on the security and development of the Philippines as the *Jabidah* incident. The incident convinced many Muslim leaders that they could not hope to be treated as equals in Philippine society; hence secession was the only option. An influential Muslim politician from Cotabato, Udtog Matalam, organized the Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM), the precursor of the Moro National Liberation Front or MNLF. Among the younger leaders of this movement was

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<sup>75</sup> Ooi Keat Gin, "How Sarawak was won", *The Star*, September 10, 2001.

<sup>76</sup> Maritess D. Vitug and Glenda Gloria. *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao*. 2000. Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Affairs, Institute for Popular Democracy, Quezon City, Philippines.

Nur Misuari, an instructor at the University of the Philippines.<sup>77</sup> Misuari would eventually emerge as the recognized leader of the Muslim struggle for independence. Clandestine preparations were made for armed revolt with the recruitment of Muslim youths, their training in Sabah and the accumulation of war materiel. Libya was one of the main supporters of the MNLF. Diplomatic relations with Malaysia were all but severed by the *Jabidah* incident and Malaysian authorities turned a blind eye on MNLF activities in Sabah. The state minister of Sabah, Tun Mustapha Harun, actively supported the MNLF.

By early 1973 the MNLF Cotabato Command, the largest MNLF unit, had an estimated 6,000 guerillas under arms. According to Fortunato Abat, the MNLF strategy called for a quick victory in Mindanao followed by the declaration of a Bangsa Moro Republic.<sup>78</sup> Evidently, the Moros anticipated diplomatic support from the other Muslim countries and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

## **B. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

The Moro secessionist movement caught the Philippine government in a dilemma. Its over-arching goal was to keep the national territory intact. Allowing secession was out of question. Mindanao especially was too deeply embedded into the national economy and polity that its loss would seriously undermine the existence of the Philippines as a viable nation. Mindanao comprised a third of the country's land area, held 22% of the population and provided about 20% of the country's GDP in 1970.<sup>79</sup> It had vast mineral resources whose potential were not yet fully exploited.

To keep its territory intact the government had to defeat the armed challenge without antagonizing Muslim countries and the international community; and it had to do

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<sup>77</sup> Phil. Army 100 Years

<sup>78</sup> Fortunato U. Abat. *The CEMCOM Story: The Day We Nearly Lost Mindanao*. SBA Printers, Inc., Quezon City, 1993.

<sup>79</sup> Population, Land Area and Density by Region and Province, Census Year 1970, National Statistics Office. [http://www.aer.ph/statistics/prov/demog/pop\\_cen70.pdf](http://www.aer.ph/statistics/prov/demog/pop_cen70.pdf)

this while protecting the Muslim communities whose areas became the battlefield of the war.

Next, it had to assure the Christian majority in Mindanao, which composed more than 80% of the island's population, that their interests would be protected. The Mindanao Christians held enormous political and economic power and had exhibited a tendency to resort to vigilantism – forming their own armed group to fight against the Muslims.

The Philippine government's 30-year effort to resolve the secessionist challenge in Mindanao has been a mix of successes, missed opportunities, inconsistent policies that only recently began to show some measure of success. Its effort was composed of diplomatic, military, political and economic initiatives.

## **1. The International Diplomatic Effort**

The purpose of the government's diplomatic effort was to neutralize foreign support for the MNLF. It sought to achieve this by negotiating directly with known MNLF supporters like Libya and Saudi Arabia. It established diplomatic relations with Middle East countries and invited ambassadors and representatives from the influential Organization of the Islamic Council (OIC) and the World Muslim League to observe first-hand the situation in Mindanao. The purpose of these tours was to convince the Muslim countries that there was no genocide being conducted against the Muslims in Mindanao.

The Government's diplomatic efforts met with some success. The OIC urged the MNLF to opt for autonomy instead of secession. Muslim countries recognized and respected the Philippines' sovereignty and desire for territorial integrity. Negotiations sponsored by Libya resulted in the 1976 Tripoli Agreement, the first substantial agreement between the government and the MNLF, which provided for Muslim autonomy.

The Agreement provided for the creation of an autonomous region composed of 13 provinces in Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan. Disagreement immediately arose regarding its implementation because the Philippine government invoked constitutional process as a prerequisite to any autonomous measures. This required a plebiscite, which the MNLF vigorously objected. A plebiscite was subsequently conducted in which 10 of the 13 provinces opted for autonomy.

The MNLF ignored the plebiscite and insisted that autonomy be immediately declared for the 13 provinces. Renewed clashes between the AFP and the rebels disrupted negotiations. However, these clashes did not have the same intensity as those before 1976. Manila also pursued direct negotiations with separate rebel factions which were led by the traditional Muslim elite. Incrementally, this piecemeal negotiations eroded MNLF strength.

Another peace agreement was signed between the MNLF and the government in 1996 which provides for more substantial autonomy. This agreement had to be modified in order to reassure the Mindanao Christians who threatened to arm themselves if the agreement granted too much power to the MNLF. This time, the Moro National Liberation Front (MILF) which broke off from the MNLF in 1984, declares that its aim is independence. Heavy fighting breaks out, this time between the MILF and the AFP.

## **2. The Military Campaign**

Like the military effort against the NPA, the campaign to inflict a military defeat on the MNLF was a success. Starting from an almost even contest in Central Mindanao in 1973, the MNLF was finished as a cohesive military force by 1984.

The war was long, bloody and expensive. The Philippine Army, which carried the burden of fighting, grew in strength from 13,500 in 1970 to 61,000 in 1980 –

an increase of 450%. The AFP spent P73 billion from 1970 to 1996 – a major portion of the entire defense budget. It is estimated that from 1970 to 1976, 46,000 lives were lost; half of these were rebel casualties.<sup>80</sup> The rebels suffered from a lack of war materiel and by 1980 were limited to a few isolated pockets in Mindanao and on the island of Sulu. Muslim communities were most affected by the war. Filipino refugees in Sabah were estimated to be more than half a million.<sup>81</sup>

By 1985 conditions in Mindanao had improved considerably that the AFP moved the bulk of its troops from Sulu to Mindanao in order to face the growing NPA threat on the island. During the short-lived ceasefire in 1976-1977, many rebels availed of an amnesty program and surrendered to the government. When fighting resumed in 1978, some rebel leaders chose to work out their own ceasefire arrangement with the government, thus the MNLF forces that continued to fight after 1978 were very much reduced. Whatever remained of the MNLF had broken up into small, isolated bands. Some began to turn to banditry. Commercial activity had begun to pick up in Mindanao and Sulu. People and produce could travel safely all over the island. Misuari was in the Middle East desperately trying to drum up support for the movement. His efforts were not successful and the MNLF was beset by internal squabbling. In 1984 a faction led by Hashim Salamat broke away and formed the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The MILF retained secession as its goal along with the creation of an Islamic state.

Scholars have generally established two criteria to code a conflict as terminated. These must be a dramatic drop in the number of deaths and a formal settlement. The second criteria – formal settlement – was unfulfilled in 1985. Because there was no formal surrender, the government did not recognize the situation as a victory. The Correlates of War, however, code the MNLF war as being over in 1980.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Carolyn O. Arguillas, *Economic cost of 'never ending conflict' P30-M daily* in MindaNews, 12 March 2003. The figure of P73 billion is quoted from a speech given by Congressman Eduardo Ermita in 1996.

<sup>81</sup> Hiromu Shimizu, *Searching for Soci-Economic Niche in Sabah under BIMP-EAGA Scheme: Preliminary Report on Christian Filipino Immigrant Workers*. Paper presented at the Workshop on Socio-Cultural Processes of Development: Sabah and BIMP-EAGA, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. August 28, 2001.

<sup>82</sup> Correlates of War

By 1984 the government had a situation that was equivalent to victory over the MNLF but failed to exploit this in the negotiations that followed after the overthrow of Marcos in 1986.

### **3. Domestic Political Initiatives**

The government's political response to the secessionist challenge was closely linked to its diplomatic effort. The government offered the rebels autonomy and greater participation in the local political process while at the same time assuring the Christians of their safety and protection. Many former rebels ran for public office and won. However, during the period 1980 to 1986 the MNLF was greatly diminished in stature. If any success came from the government's political effort, it was evident in the unraveling of the MNLF and with the break off by the MILF. The MILF retained the goal of secession and added to it the creation of an Islamic, not a secular, state.

The MNLF continued to demand immediate declaration of autonomy in the 13 provinces identified in the Tripoli Agreement but refused to participate in the political process in Mindanao. The government maintained that a plebiscite is required under the Constitution and created a Regional Consultative Commission (RCC) prior to the conduct of an autonomy plebiscite. The MNLF and the MIFL bitterly opposed this.

At any rate, in 1989 the government created the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) with Zacarias Candao as the first governor. Again, the MNLF and the MILF refused to participate in the ARMM.

When Fidel Ramos was elected president in 1992, negotiations are resumed with the MNLF and the MILF. As before, both rebel groups are treated as military equals in the negotiating table. It appears that Ramos did not want to break the pattern set by the previous administration at the risk of appearing hawkish.

#### 4. The Economic Effort

Unfortunately for the government, the meaningful implementation of its economic programs depended on the success of its political effort. If the situation remained unstable, as it did following the return of the MNLF, commercial activity could not recover. The MNLF and the MIFL set about establishing so-called check-points along the major highways in Mindanao. Many of these rebel installations extorted from the traffic on these highways creating friction between government security forces and adversely affecting economic activity.

To achieve *Moro* cooperation, the government tried to get MNLF leaders to lead the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Only in 1996 did Misuari agree to be governor of the ARMM. From 1990 to 1999 the autonomous region received P20.7 billion (approximately \$380 million) from the national government, more than half of these during Misuari's term. In terms of per capita allocation by region, the ARMM had the second highest in the country.<sup>83</sup> However, these funds were not spent judiciously. Accounting records showed that there were serious imbalances in ARMM's expenditures. For example, in 1997, 81% went to salaries, 18% to operations and only 1% went infrastructure. These shortcomings created friction between Misuari and the central government so that by 1998, he was increasingly seen as a liability than as an asset. It did not help that Misuari always raised the threat of renewed hostilities whenever he felt he was being eased out.

The region remained depressed. In 2002, six of the ten ARMM provinces are among the 10 poorest provinces nationwide.<sup>84</sup>

Nevertheless, pursuit of infrastructure projects show some promise if government is determined to complete said projects. The case of the Malitubog-Maridagao (Mal-

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<sup>83</sup>Maritess Vitug and Glenda Gloria. *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao*. 2000. Ateneo Center for Social Issues and Policy, Quezon City.

<sup>84</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, "Mindanao has 6 of 10 'poorest provinces'", *MindaNews*, Vol. 2, No. 154, 7 October 2003. <http://www.mindanews.com/2003/10/07nws-poorest.html>

Mar )Irrigation Project illustrates this. This was a project that succeeded ins spite of rebel activity. It was started in 1989 to irrigate 20,000 hectares of rice land in Central Mindanao but was delayed for 18 months because the MILF insisted on occupying the construction site as a ‘security force’. Since the MILF was the only other major presence in the area aside from government security forces, it was unclear against who or what the security was required for. Many saw it as a form of blackmail: projects could only proceed if the *Moros* took a cut of the funds.

The project was a P1.7 billion irrigation project started in 1989 to benefit inhabitants of an area that was a hotbed of rebellion led by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). When fully completed the project will irrigate almost 11,000 hectares of rice land, allowing year-round cultivation.<sup>86</sup> Originally scheduled to be completed in 1997, the project was suspended for almost two years when MILF rebels insisted that they provide ‘security’ for the project. The Army accused the MILF of extortion and fighting erupted between the rebels and government troops. Several Chinese engineers were kidnapped and two of them were killed during an attempted rescue. An arrangement was worked out that would allow work to continue. The provincial governor declared that the project implementers did not sufficiently inform the local inhabitants about the project, which led to suspicion and misunderstanding about the intentions of the government in the area.

Finally, in September 2001, the first phase of the project, which would irrigate 3,800 hectares was inaugurated. Scores of rebels and their families returned to rice-farming as a result of the project. Several clans feuding over land have settled their differences so that they could concentrate on farming. Productivity increased more than 100%.<sup>87</sup> Today, the inhabitants, many of them former rebels, are awaiting the extension of the project so that more land can be irrigated for rice farming.

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<sup>86</sup> [http://www.cyberdyaryo.com/features/f2001\\_0927\\_02.htm](http://www.cyberdyaryo.com/features/f2001_0927_02.htm)

<sup>87</sup> “Donors see Mal-Mar irrigation project a showcase for peace and development”, News and Features, Mindanao Economic Development Council (MEDCo), <http://www.medco.gov.ph/medcoweb/newsfeatl.asp?NewsMode=20&NewsMonthNo=11&NewsYearNo=2>



## 5. Aquino's Acquiescence

When Marcos was ousted in 1986, the government of Corazon Aquino wanted to make a fresh start on the issue of secession and indicated that it would negotiate with the MNLF for a just and lasting peace. As a gesture of good faith, the Aquino administration declared a ceasefire and invited Misuari to return from the Middle East. The AFP, recognizing that the MNLF had been severely weakened by continuous fighting, strongly opposed negotiations and believed that continued military pressure would bring better results for the government.<sup>88</sup> Their objections, and it doesn't appear to be strong or assertive, were overruled. Misuari returned and immediately set about consolidating his fragmented and dormant forces. He traveled extensively all over Mindanao – on government expense - and mounted several “shows of force”. During the ceasefire, the MNLF managed to gather and concentrate its dispersed bands and to stage impressive displays of numerical strength. The purpose of these displays was to convince the government of the MNLF's strength. The MILF, too, would not be left behind and launched a five-day offensive in early 1987 to gain government attention.

Misuari's ploy worked. From his resurrection in 1986 until his ignominious arrest by Malaysian authorities in late 2001, Misuari had the government eating out of his hand. From the outset the MNLF insisted on establishing a political entity already rejected by the vast majority of the Mindanao population as early as 1978. The MNLF (and the MILF) wanted the government to immediately declare the 13 provinces identified in the Tripoli Agreement as autonomous (secession for the MILF). How the MNLF and the MILF would work out this conflict of purpose is unclear. The government countered that it had to consult the populations concerned with a plebiscite. The government was confident it could get favorable results against autonomy because

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assessed 15 November 2003.

<sup>88</sup> Vitug, p. 37. Aquino's emissary to Misuari was Norberto Gonzales, then chairman of the *Partido Demokrasya Sosyalista ng Pilipinas*. When Gonzales told Misuari about the AFP's skepticism about MNLF capabilities, the latter had his commanders in Mindanao show Gonzales around rebel troop concentrations. Video images of these displays were shown to the AFP command who were allegedly convinced of MNLF's potency.

the majority of the population concerned was Christian who did not wish to be under the MNLF.

When it became known that the government signed an interim agreement which granted the MNLF control over most of Mindanao, especially agreeing to the creation of a regional security force under Misuari, many Christians vowed to create their own security forces. The government set about modifying some of the provisions of the agreement.

The error committed by the Aquino administration in dealing with the *Moros* was a two-step process. First, it decided to negotiate with the rebels. This was not in itself a mistake since an agreed termination was preferable to an open-ended rebellion. But its second and more serious mistake was to regard the *Moros* as being at par, militarily, with the government. As described above, this simply was not the case.

At the negotiating table, the MNLF was able to extract from the government concessions they could not win on the battlefield. Among these was the integration of 7,250 guerillas into the AFP and the national police, the recognition of several MNLF camps and the creation of a regional security force under Misuari. It was only when the Christians in Mindanao threatened to form their own security forces that the government modified the provisions of the peace agreement by watering down the regional security force.

The peace and order situation in 2002 was worse than it was in 1986. There are still about 14,000 MNLF guerillas under various degrees of control in Mindanao and Sulu. The MILF claims to have 120,000 men under arms. (AFP estimates the actual number at closer to 12,000). The Abu Sayaff, non-existent in 1986, has replaced the MNLF and the MILF as the main threat to peace and order in Mindanao. It claims links with the *Al Qaeda* and the *Jemayaat Islamiyah* – both terrorist organizations. With assistance from the JI, the rebels had tried to export violence to Manila by bombing several mass transit systems and killing 22 people in late 2001.

Had the Aquino administration negotiated from a position of strength and confidence in 1986, a position won at great sacrifice by the AFP, it would have better used the time and resources it squandered trying to satisfy Misuari during the next 16 years in rebuilding Mindanao. The government should have dictated the terms of the agreement, not bargain with the MNLF, especially along provisions allowing the rebels to retain the capability of restarting the rebellion. The option it should have presented to the MNLF should have been “take it or fight for it”. Had the MNLF chosen to fight, it would have been decisively reduced and peace and reconstruction could have proceeded uninterrupted. The MNLF’s true strength was finally revealed in 2001 when its attack on government forces failed. This information was already known in 1986; it was ignored.

The violence that continues in Mindanao is estimated to cost between P8-11 billion a year.<sup>89</sup> At that rate this is equal to P150 billion and sixteen years - that is the cost the government paid because it adopted the wrong strategy in negotiating with the *Moros* back in 1986.

### C. THE ROLE OF 3<sup>RD</sup> PARTIES

Unlike the NPA, the *Moros* rely heavily on outside support. It was outside support from Libya and Sabah that weighed heavily in favor of launching a rebellion.<sup>90</sup> It was also outside influence, especially by the Organization of the Islamic Conference that prevailed upon the MNLF to modify its goal from secession to autonomy, and to negotiate instead of to fight. The sources and influence of this intervention has changed over the duration of the conflict.

From the late 1960’s to about 1974, most of the 3<sup>rd</sup> party influence especially from Libya, the Malaysian state of Sabah and Saudi Arabia was material support for the armed rebellion. This changed in 1975 when a diplomatic effort by the Philippine

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<sup>89</sup> Joshua Dancel, “Mindanao budget shrinking in last 3 years”, *The Manila Times*, April 3, 2003 .  
[http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2003/apr/03/top\\_stories/20030403top7.html](http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2003/apr/03/top_stories/20030403top7.html)

<sup>90</sup> Vitug and Gloria, p. 22

government eventually bore fruit as the Tripoli Agreement. Since then, Muslim nations had a moderating influence on the *Moros*, a stance that continues to today.

Influence from sub-national groups like the *Al Qaeda* and the *Jemaah Islamiya* are believed to have begun after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. During the 1980's some *Moro* youths went to Afghanistan to fight as *mujahideen* against the Soviet invasion. When they returned they carried with them the fundamentalist zeal and international connections that would facilitate the entry of organizations like the *Al Qaeda* and the *Jemaah Islamiyah*. These groups sought to transform the secessionist movement into a religious movement (*jihad*) and challenged the leadership of the mainstream rebel movements. The effect was a breaking off as radical members saw more fulfillment in the approach of groups like the *Abu Sayaff*.

#### **D. EXPLAINING THE LAPSE**

Threats from other quarters, especially RAM, the ineptness of the Government's negotiating team and poor advice provided by the AFP offer several explanations why the Government ended up negotiating with the MNLF on a basis that did not correctly reflect actual tactical situation on the ground.

The Aquino administration was facing serious threats from the extreme right represented by the RAM and chose not to complicate its risks by taking a conciliatory position with the MNLF. The AFP was trying to avoid fighting a two-front war against MNLF and NPA.

A second possible explanation is simple incompetence of the Government negotiating team. The diplomats who spearheaded negotiations under Marcos were all replaced by newcomers to the art of negotiations. Prominent among these were Aquino's brother-in-law, Agapito Aquino, and the former mayor of Cagayan de Oro City, Aquilino Pimentel. The MNLF, of course, was always represented by Misuari who, by 1986, was a

seasoned veteran of several negotiations since 1975. The Aguino government also did not want to appear like its hated predecessor, Marcos, in dealing with the rebels.

Third, poor advice from the AFP contributed to the failure. Although initially against negotiations, AFP leaders did not stand their ground when confronted with video images of staged MNLF demonstrations. It was common knowledge in AFP intelligence circles that the MNLF was on a recruiting drive prior to the negotiations. This intelligence, already available in 1985, was largely ignored during the time leading up to the negotiations. The AFP did not trust its own intelligence.

Unlike the NPA, the *Moro* rebellion is sensitive to 3<sup>rd</sup> party influence. Of late this influence has been positive. Despite a succession of administrations, government programs are beginning to be felt in Mindanao. More Muslim political leaders are in government and in the civil service; thousands of former guerillas have been absorbed into the AFP and the police. Infrastructure like irrigation and roads are improving the lives of former rebels. A long war is not advantageous to the Moros because it is the Muslim population that suffers.

## V. THE FUTURE

Inadequate government response to insurgent challenges, as exemplified in its fight-and-develop strategy, the NPA strategy of protracted war and 3<sup>rd</sup> party intervention in the case of the *Moro* rebellion provides the major explanations for the endurance of Philippine insurgencies. The conflicts continue. The influences of these factors are presented in the table below:

	<b>Inadequate gov't. response</b>	<b>Deliberate Strategy</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Party Intervention</b>
<b>NPA</b>	High	High	Low
<b><i>Moros</i></b>	High	Low	High

**Table 1. Influences on insurgency in the Philippines.**

Despite the isolation of violence to certain areas and its generally low intensity, the Philippines cannot fight and develop at the same time. Violence occurring anywhere within a society affects the whole. Resources allocated for maintaining an acceptable level of security will deny those very same resources from development. Development infrastructure like roads and bridges cannot be built if rebels continue to extort from the contractors or sabotage equipment. Classes cannot be conducted if classrooms are used to accommodate evacuees from fighting. Efforts to fight and develop will ultimately result in both failing. Funds thus misspent and wasted constitute a double loss for society. It would be more efficient to spend adequately first on security, and then only after sufficient security has been established should developmental efforts be pursued.

### A. EXPLAINING THE DURATION

The cost of conflict determines its duration and, eventually, its outcome. In insurgencies, the cost of remaining in the fight is lower for the weaker actor than for the stronger actor. Societies suffering from civil conflict are generally so impoverished that

living conditions for the rebels are little different under conditions of peace or conflict. The stronger actor, on the other hand, suffers much more heavily. Much depends on how either actor strategically interplays with the other.

## **1. A Flawed Strategy**

The government's response to both insurgencies exemplified in its unconscious fight-and-develop strategy holds the major explanation for their longevity. Its military effort lacks weight and decisiveness in defeating the rebel armed groups. Its long-term strategy like the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program which would have deflated agrarian unrest is inadequate because, as earlier stated, the size of distributable land is insufficient for a large and growing number of farmer beneficiaries. At the same time the pace of distribution is slow, often delayed by legal obstructions put up by landowners. John Sidel provides an interesting explanation of how, despite overwhelming poverty and a supposedly democratically elected government, the elite still manage not only to hang on to, but to broaden and deepen their positions in the political power structure.<sup>91</sup> The political system has made it extremely difficult for candidates with little or no economic power to be elected. Thus the government, especially the legislative branch, is composed mostly of the landholding elite whose political power feeds their own economic power in a self-serving cycle. Efforts to attract foreign investment and to pump-prime the domestic economy fail because of unfavorable conditions. The dispersal of the Government's resources substantially weakens its impact on the situation.

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<sup>91</sup> John T.Sidel. "Philippine Politics in Town, District, and Province: Bossism in Cavite and Cebu. *The Journal of Asian Studies*. Vol. 56, No. 4 (Nov. 1997). He writes "...patron-client dyads provide the essential social adhesive in Philippine society, crosscutting and undermining potential cleavages based on class, corporate or ethnic solidarities through webs of particularistic alliances on bonds of personal reciprocity". Read Kerkvliet's explanation for the rise of the *Huk* rebellion in Central Luzon, in p.29, this paper.

## **2. Protracted War Strategy**

Commitment to a strategy of protracted war explains the NPA's willingness to ignore what, to the revolutionary mind, would be minor gains achieved by negotiations today for a more total revolutionary victory in the future. A small but influential core within the CPP/NPA maintains the original aim of overthrowing the present political structure through armed struggle. In 2001 the government suspended negotiations with the NPA due to the latter's assassination of elected government officials. Captured documents and public declarations made by NPA leaders indicate a 'talk and fight' strategy pursued by the communists which raises the commitment problem in negotiations with the NPA.

For the Moro rebellion, a protracted war is the next best option to a preferred strategy of a quick victory. When its initial offensives were repelled in 1973, the Moros settled down to guerilla warfare but always exploited opportunities to establish bases and mark out territory – making them vulnerable to AFP operations.

## **3. Intervention by 3<sup>rd</sup> Parties**

Active support by the state leadership of Sabah and material support from Libya and Saudi Arabia made the possible the option of armed rebellion for the Moros. However, it was also the influence of 3<sup>rd</sup> parties, especially Libya and Indonesia, which compelled the MNLF to accept autonomy instead of secession.

The NPA is little influenced by 3<sup>rd</sup> parties. Its failures to smuggle in arms resulted in increasing indifference by China. The revenues it has extracted domestically through 'revolutionary tax' and outright criminal activities has made the NPA self-sufficient and self-determined.



#### **4. Failure to Capitalize on Military Gains**

Military operations had effectively reduced the MNLF as an armed threat by 1984, but the political and security situation elsewhere in the country did not allow the government to fully exploit this advantage. The *Huks* were eliminated as an internal threat to national security in 1951 yet the basic causes of the rebellion were largely left to smolder until it re-ignited in the NPA rebellion of 1969. During the 34 years of this continuing conflict the NPA suffered grievously: 22,799 deaths as against 9,867 by government security forces. The *Moros*, likewise, suffered approximately 50,000 casualties against 30,000 killed on the government side. Since these personnel and material losses were not readily replaceable by the rebels, they must have had a heavy impact on the rebellions. That the insurgencies continued in spite of these losses indicate that direct strategies have limited effectiveness. The rebels themselves have said that unless the basic causes are resolved the rebellions will not end.

#### **5. Splintering Rebel Movements**

Break away groups did not recognize any agreement with the Government. Additionally, these new rebel groups compensated for their smaller size by committing acts of greater violence. For the splinter group, it is more profitable to fight than to settle. In such situations, it serves no purpose to negotiate because the main rebel group cannot commit to observing the terms of the agreement.<sup>92</sup>

The MNLF had sloughed off the MILF and the latter, the Abu Sayaff. The MILF attacked several towns simultaneously in Mindanao in 2000 provoking a severe military response from the Government. The Abu Sayaff pillaged the town of Ipil, in Zamboanga del Sur in 1995 and kidnapped tourists in Sabah and in Palawan in 1999 and 2000.

The NPA has splintered into a few mostly localized groups. The *Rebolusyonaryong Hukbong Bayan* (RHB) is a resurrection of the Huks; in Panay island

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<sup>92</sup> Paul Collier, "Rebellion as quasi-criminal activity", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2000, Vol 44.

the Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade (RAP-ABB) broke away from the NPA. Some of these splinter groups have been encouraged by the AFP while others, like the RHB, are opportunistic having decided to extract 'revolutionary taxes' on their own. The most notorious of these groups was the Red Scorpion Group (RSG) which was composed of former NPA urban guerillas that turned to kidnapping.

There is a major difference in the behavior of break away groups from the NPA and the *Moros*: the NPA itself adheres to violence as its main form of struggle while its breakaway groups often reach an agreement with the government. For the *Moros*, the main groups reach agreement with the government while the splinter groups continue to commit violent acts.

## **6. Theories of Intrastate Conflict Termination**

R. Harrison Wagner offers the explanation that an extended duration of war, even in a stalemate, is a bargaining period where each side tries to convince the other of its own inevitable victory and the other's inevitable defeat.<sup>93</sup> And since the stalemate is marked by a low level of violence (compared to conventional war), the cost of continuing the conflict, i.e., extending its duration, is actually low for both actors.

The NPA is obviously engaged in a war of attrition with the government, a situation described by William Zartman as a 'hurting stalemate'.<sup>94</sup> From 1997 to 2002, the NPA incurred 1,248 casualties against 530 for the government. From 1970 to 2002 about 43,000 lives were lost in the communist-led insurgency, including more than 10,000 civilians; 22,799 of these were NPA guerillas.<sup>95</sup> The bloodiest year was 1985 when 4,545 deaths were recorded. Economy-wise, the country fell behind its neighbors in

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<sup>93</sup> R. Harrison Wagner, "Bargaining and War", *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (July 2000)

<sup>94</sup> William I. Zartman. "The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments". *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*. Vol. 1, No. 1, (September 2001)

<sup>95</sup> Vincent Cabreza. "43,000 killed in 34 years of communist rebellion" in *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 29 Jan 2003.

economic performance so that by 2002, it was estimated that one in every three Filipinos lived below the poverty threshold.

A mutually hurting stalemate is a precondition to a negotiated settlement. A mutually hurting stalemate occurs when the “countervailing power of each side, though insufficient to make the other side lose, prevents it from winning”.<sup>96</sup> That being the case, what keeps them from cutting a deal with the government?

The NPA is convinced that the existing political system in the Philippines is destined by the dialectic process for eventual collapse. As stated earlier, it interprets the series of economic and political crises besetting Philippine society as sure signs of this eagerly awaited collapse.

Fearon offers an alternative explanation for the difficulty of ending insurgencies: neither party trusts the other to honor any commitments made during negotiations. The government, for example, suspects that the rebels will use the peace to recover and rebuild their strength; the rebels, likewise, suspect that once they agree to lay down their arms, the government will immediately exterminate them. Thus each side retains the capability to re-ignite the violence even if a peace agreement has been reached.

One solution to resolve the commitment problem was the integration of Moro rebels into the AFP, which was part of the 1996 agreement. The move worked better than anticipated, to the grudging agreement by the AFP.

The NPA has insisted on a power-sharing arrangement and recognition of controlled areas, something that Manila is not prepared to do.

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<sup>96</sup> Zartman, *op cit.*

## B. RESOLVING THE INSURGENCIES

The internal conflicts in the Philippines are asymmetric – one side is more than twice the other, measured in material terms. The stronger actor is, of course, the government. Strategic interaction helps to explain the outcome of symmetric conflict better than does simple asymmetry of interest because it is difficult to measure abstract concepts like will or interest.

Actors locked in an asymmetric conflict are faced with two strategic options – a direct strategy which targets the enemy's capability to wage war, or an indirect strategy which targets the enemy's will to fight. A direct strategy will seek to destroy an enemy's weapons, his troops, his communications centers or his logistics. However, actors still regenerate their capability to fight. An indirect strategy will target an enemy's home, his family, and values. An enemy addressed by such a strategy loses interest in the fight since the very reasons for fighting are gone.

Arreguin-Toft proposed that “when strong actors employ barbarism to attack weak actors defending with a guerilla warfare strategy (GWS), all other things being equal, strong actors should win”.<sup>97</sup>

Although the NPA is employing guerilla warfare strategy, the government can only employ barbarism at the risk of becoming an outlaw state. Yet, as demonstrated in the Mal-Mar project above, there is a method for attacking the enemy's will without “burning the village”. The Philippine government will have to apply a combination of short and long-term strategies (also direct and indirect) to defeat the insurgencies. This can be called the fight-and-then-develop strategy. It differs from fight-and-develop because it requires first the effective elimination of the military threat posed by the insurgency before any development project is initiated *in the zone of combat*. As earlier

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<sup>97</sup> Arreguin-Toft, p. 109

defined, direct strategies focus on the rebels' capability to wage war; indirect strategies focus on their will to fight. Applied in combination and directed at specific areas where the insurgencies are widespread, this fight (direct strategy) and then develop (indirect strategies) will be more potent than the current fight-and-develop strategy. Moreover, it is a deliberate and carefully considered effort rather than one that only falls together in hindsight.

## **1. Direct or Short-Term Strategies**

Direct or short term strategies aim to decisively eliminate the military threat posed by the armed elements of the NPA and the *Moros*. Simply put, the overall strategy against the insurgency would be to make armed revolt expensive while undercutting its fundamental causes. The role of the AFP in reversing this spiral is to contain the violence. Only when this is achieved can developmental efforts proceed and recovery take place. Peace and stability encourages economic activity. Increased economic activity creates growth which has a broad impact on society. Eventually, the contribution of the AFP is secondary to that of the political and economic structural adjustments that will address the root causes of societal conflict. Whatever can be gained from initial successful military operations will be temporary if not followed by fundamental changes.

(1) Eliminating rebel sanctuaries. Because the Philippines is physically separated from any of its neighbors, the rebels are denied the sanctuary where they can rest and recuperate immune from government security forces. What exist are artificial sanctuaries – areas that have weak government presence, poor infrastructure and marginal terrain or where democratic practice protects 'innocent' rebel activities. In the past, determined government efforts to penetrate these so-called sanctuaries have successfully degraded rebel presence but have not totally eliminated them. In the Marag Valley, for example, a continued military presence has reduced rebel influence but has not materially improved the lives of its inhabitants. The other sanctuary is that offered by

cause-oriented groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The causes espoused by these groups, like environmental protection and human rights, are valid causes. But since these groups are used or allow themselves to be used to shield rebel activity, their original causes are compromised.

(2) Legislative support for counterinsurgency. The Philippines is the only nation in Southeast Asia facing not only one but at least two serious internal security challenges without an internal security act.<sup>98</sup> The lack of legislation which will allow robust and effective COIN activity partly explains the propensity of government security forces to commit abuses. Admittedly, the country's experience with martial law and the series of military-led uprisings explains the hesitation by the Congress to pass such laws. But collaborative relations between the defense establishment and the legislature should work towards such legislation.

In mid-2002 Congress passed the Anti-Money Laundering Law. This Law is an off-shoot of the events of 9/11, and was aimed at international financial transactions. However it must be enlarged to carry domestic impact. A local version of this law should also be enacted to thwart rebel resource generation efforts. These laws are unpopular but essential to the defeat of the insurgency. It is the task of the political leadership to prepare the population to accept or at least tolerate temporarily these laws.

Counterinsurgency requires a broad approach and the armed forces should limit itself to its area of competence. By trying to go it alone, the AFP has become highly politicized. The other agencies of government involved in the delivery of basic goods and services must assume their share of the counterinsurgency burden.

At the local levels, the elected political leaders should provide leadership for the counterinsurgency campaign. If the local community leaders do not

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<sup>98</sup> Indonesia until recently had an internal security act but this was repealed after Suharto was overthrown in 1998. Malaysia and Singapore have maintained their respective ISA's although neither face any internal security challenge.

lead or take active participation in the counterinsurgency campaign, then no military activity has any hope of success in that community.

Barbara Walter argues that neutral enforcers of agreements would eliminate a major barrier to a negotiated settlement in internal conflicts.<sup>99</sup> In Philippine case, international peacekeepers on the ground would be an improvement on the previous peace agreements. In 1977 observers were provided by Senegal and Somalia but their presence, which was minimal, did not deter fighting from breaking out mainly due to the lack of a coercive presence and prestige. A prominent and assertive presence by a mutually acceptable 3<sup>rd</sup> party would enforce a stronger, more stable peace. At the present time, both Malaysia and the U. S. have indicated their willingness to provide this intervention.

## **2. Indirect or Long-Term Strategies**

Indirect or long-term strategies focus on an opponent's will to fight. In the Philippine case these are a sincere land reform program and fundamental political reform.

Arguably, no other government program will have such a deflating effect on both the communist guerilla movement and the Moro secessionist movement as a sincere and determined effort to redistribute the main source of wealth in an agricultural society. The challenge posed by economies of scale will have to be worked out, but granting land to the tiller, even if land is no longer the source of wealth it once was, is a very powerful tool that the Government cannot ignore. Individuals with a stake in society are not likely to seek the destruction of that society.

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<sup>99</sup> Barbara F. Walter. "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement". 1997. *International Organization* 51.

The Philippine political system does not have a real opposition and is drawn from a single class of society. Even those elected as a ‘peoples’ candidate with humble roots eventually join the elite. Political power, writes Sidel, begets economic power.<sup>100</sup> This is one reason that the Philippine economy is so sensitive to political uncertainties. A genuine opposition will have to be created and the patron-client relationship reduced if not totally eliminated so that candidates will be elected on merit, not popularity.

It is not necessary for the Government to seek a formal negotiated settlement to end the rebellions. Such a settlement would serve no purpose when faced with an obdurate rebellion (NPA) or one where break-away groups continue to threaten and commit violence. What is important is to reduce the level of violence to a point that would allow normal economic activity to take place. The *Huk* rebellion and the Malayan Emergency ended without formal agreements<sup>101</sup>. These were insurgencies that just ‘faded away’. The same can apply to both the NPA and the Moro rebellions.

For an insurgency to ‘fade away’ the cost of armed resistance should be sufficiently high to discourage it and there should be palpable, substantial improvements in the lives of those who are part of the rebellion.

Delaying resolution of the communist and Moro rebellions will impose increasingly higher and, eventually, insurmountable economic and social costs on Filipino society. In 1970 when the insurgencies were developing, the Philippines was less densely populated and was more affluent. With the geographical fragmentation of the country’s territory and the fragility of its society, the Philippines can easily transform into a failed state, each island or region ruled by its own warlord-elite. Everyone would be poorer and society would be totally Hobessian – a war of all against all.

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<sup>100</sup> Op cit.

<sup>101</sup> The Malayan Emergency ended in 1960 but the formal surrender was signed in 1989 – 29 years after the actual end of hostilities.



### C. FUTURE RESEARCH

This thesis has not covered in depth the long term options of the Philippine government's response to internal challenges. A more substantial study could focus on the effects political reforms. For example, the number of directly elected Muslim political leaders from 1960 to the present can be compared to the level of violence associated with the *Moro* rebellion. For the NPA, the historical levels of tax collection in NPA afflicted areas can be gathered to determine the degree of communist influence. Both these threads of future research require some primary data gathering.

For the phenomena of political violence and rebellion in the Philippines as a whole, research could focus on the effects of an archipelagic geography – 7,100 islands – on the formation of a modern nation-state. Comparisons could be made with Japan (only 4 major islands and certainly consolidated) and Indonesia (17,000 islands and certainly fragmented), the only other archipelagic states. Geography and social cohesion could be another branch to pursue. Geographical fragmentation severely limits the reach and influence of any centralizing force in much the same way that it limits the spread of rebellion.

## APPENDIX A

### RESULTS OF MILITARY OPERATIONS AGAINST THE NPA AND THE MOROS

1997-2002

(Source: Philippine Army)

	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2002</u>	<b>T o t a l</b>
AFP Killed Against NPA	22	29	81	112	152	134	530
AFP Killed Against Moros	91	24	59	250	121	123	668
Total AFP Killed	113	53	140	362	273	257	<b>1,198</b>
NPA Killed	91	117	258	189	176	417	<b>1,248</b>
Moro Killed	157	76	183	1,025	244	413	<b>2,098</b>
Firearms Lost to NPA	67	37	107	96	92	54	<b>453</b>
Firearms Lost to Moros	20	5	17	115	51	39	<b>247</b>
Firearms Gained	686	385	423	442	397	941	<b>3,274</b>

from NPA							
Firearms Gained from Moros	498	288	315	1,890	621	1,338	<b>4,950</b>

Note: Only infantry-type firearms are reflected here.

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